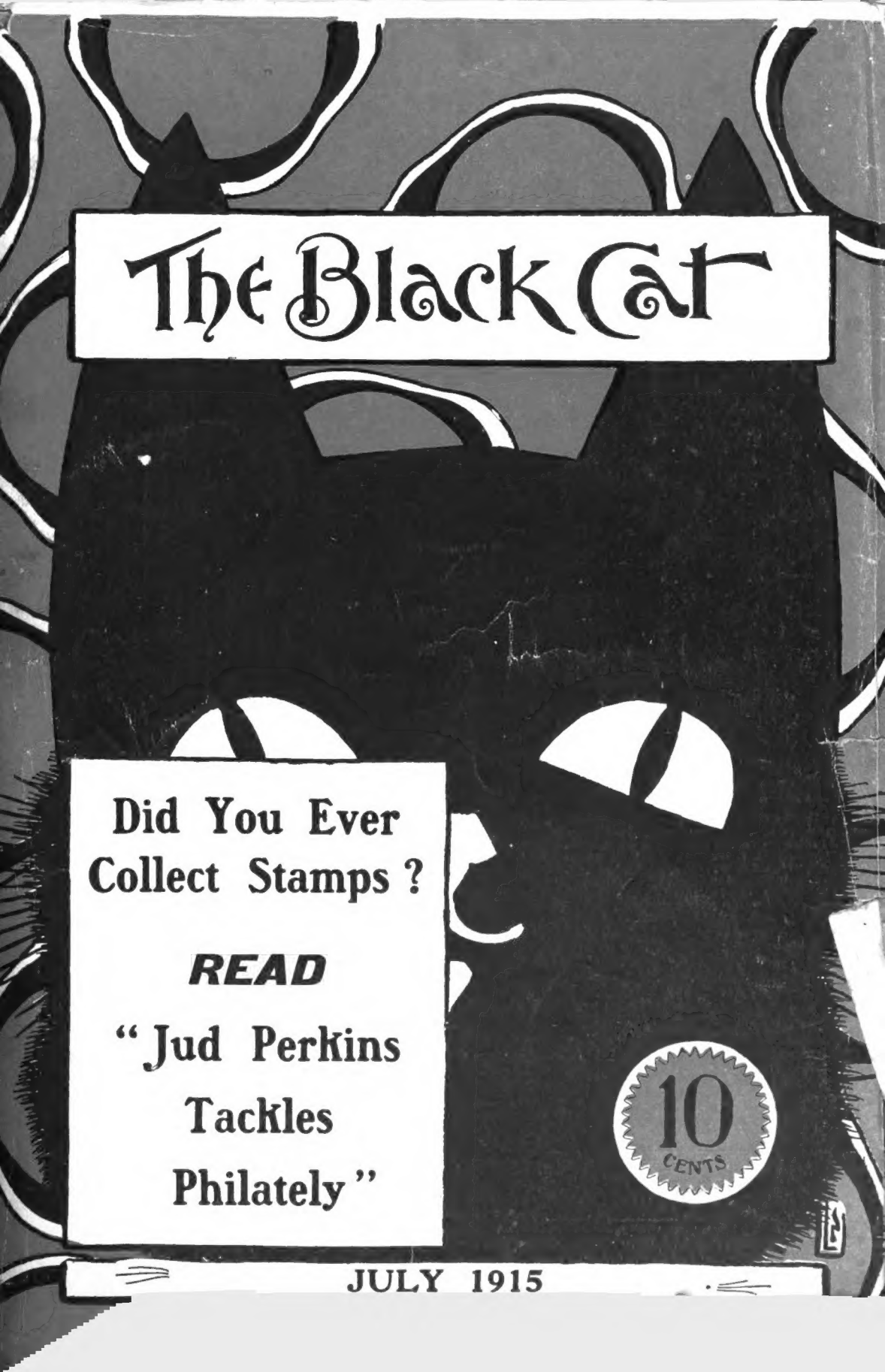
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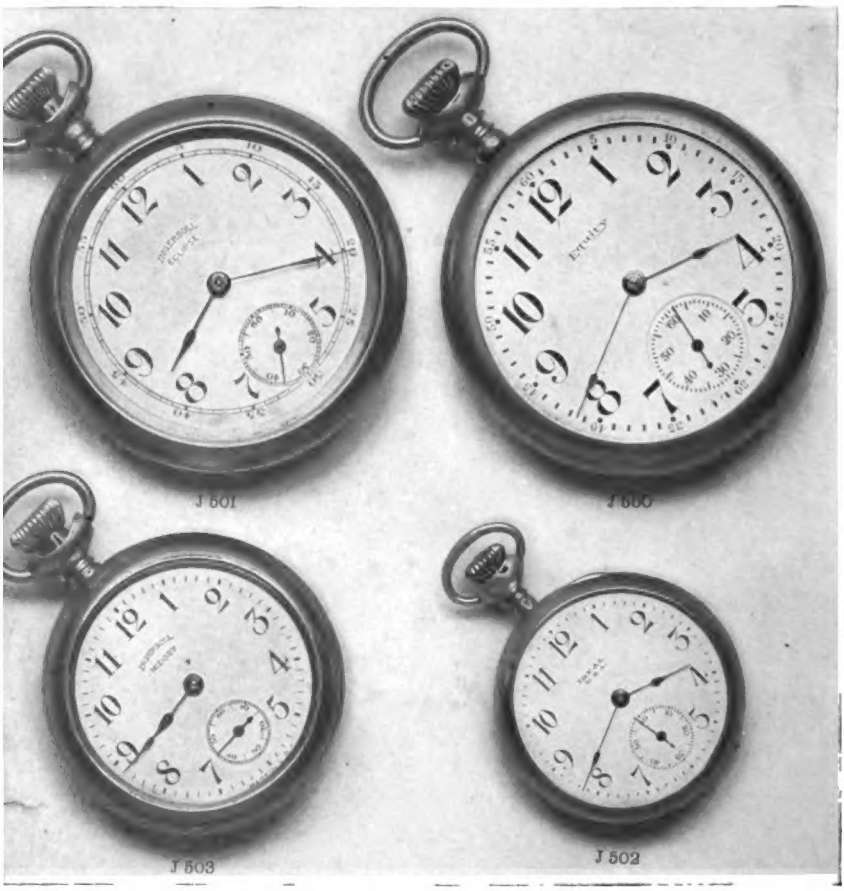

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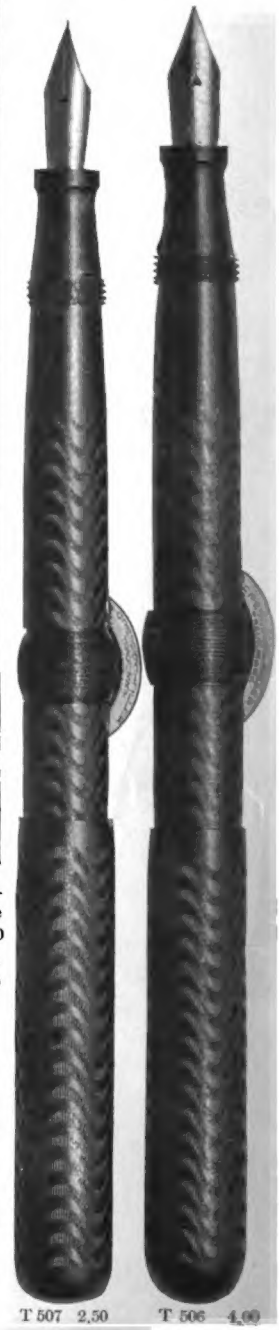

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The Black Cat

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Loring Avenue, Salem, Mass. 322 Regent Street, London, W., England
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The Black Cat

The 89's Hoodoo

BY L. S. CHESTER

A practical joker is the unconscious hero in the saving of a heavily-laden passenger train from certain destruction.

BILLY HUBLER, the best engineer on the Little Sandy Division of the T. L. & V., climbed into the cab of the 89 and began slowly to pull on his blue denim jacket and overalls which he kept neatly folded in the seatbox. Billy pulled the mixed local, and for five years had done precisely this same thing; but on this particular morning his movements betrayed a marked indecision.

He carefully folded his coat and vest and placed them in the seatbox between the sheets of a clean newspaper; then taking wrench and oil can climbed down and began to putter about the engine. He filled an oil cup in a nervous, half-hearted manner and tapped about idly with his wrench. Billy was strangely prepossessed.

"Did you report her, Billy?" The fireman rounded the pilot still dressed in his street clothes and stood, hands rammed deep into his pockets, eyeing the engineer quizzingly.

Billy ignored the query. "You're late, Fred," he remarked without looking up. "Hustle into your overalls and give her jacket a going over. She looks rusty this morning."

"And she can stay rusty so far as I'm concerned," returned the fireman. "I asked if you reported her." A hostile gleam shone in his eyes.

"No-o, not yet," Billy replied slowly, his eyes avoiding those of the other. "I don't like to go to the old man with a tale like that. It don't sound right. Thought I'd try her just one more trip. Maybe she'll settle down and behave."

The fireman took a step toward the cab, turned and came back. He faced Billy, feet planted wide, shoulders hunched, and a very determined expression on his face.

"You'll get another engine or another fireman," he announced decisively. "I don't intend to risk my neck again today. I'll do anything within reason for you, Billy. Ask me to go over Niagara Falls in a dishpan or take a young bobcat away from its mother and I'll do it; but don't ask me to fire the 89. I wouldn't ride 'er another mile for the whole blame system."

Billy fingered his chin thoughtfully. It was plain that he wished to avoid

a trip to the master mechanic if possible.

"Just today, Fred," he pleaded. "Tomorrow I'll tell 'im."

"No," Fred refused stolidly. "Never again."

Billy hesitated for a moment, then drew himself up resolutely and struck out across the tracks toward the roundhouse.

Jimmy Eagan, the master mechanic, sat hunched over his desk, sweating through a bunch of correspondence of a none too complimentary nature from the general office. As Billy clamped nervously in he whirled about, mopping his streaming forehead, and snorted:

"Well, what now?"

"There's something wrong with the 89—"

"Tell the machinist," snapped Eagan. "I've troubles of my own. That new superintendent and the incompetent engineers on the division are enough to run a man crazy. Get out!"

Billy was far from incompetent, and he knew it; he was, however, somewhat timid when in the presence of his superiors Jimmy Eagan was aware of Billy's weakness and went on reading his correspondence, certain that the interview was at an end.

The abashed engineer took a few steps toward the door, halted, looked around timidly at the perspiring official and shuffled out. He was about to enter the shop, but realizing that he had no business there, turned abruptly and began to retrace his steps to where the 89 stood panting at the head of the waiting local.

However, before reaching the engine, he drew himself up stiffly, gave the visor of his cap a determined yank and strode back to the roundhouse.

"Now see here, Eagan," he shot, before the little spark of courage could desert him, "I've got to have another engine. There's something wrong with the 89."

Eagan flared red and sucked in a deep breath for another tirade, but Billy beat him to it.

"It—it ain't what you think, Eagan," he floundered. "It—it's something else. The 89 's hoodooed."

Eagan, who was a short, thickset man with sandy hair, a red face and a redder temper, threw down his papers and sent the waste basket ricocheting across the floor with the toe of his heavy boot.

"For the love of Heaven, Hubler—"

He faced about and his plethoric features blanched slightly when he beheld the pale, nervous face of his subordinate. Evidently Billy was in dead earnest. Notwithstanding the absurdity of his statement, there was no doubt that he believed just what he said.

"You're crazy, Hubler," Eagan said at length, "or maybe you're sick. Better lay off a trip or two. You've been working too hard."

"I ain't crazy nor I ain't sick," affirmed Billy doggedly. "I feel as well as I ever did. That engine's hoodooed, Eagan. I know what I'm talking about. It's been going on for a week now. I can't stand it any longer."

Convinced now that Billy was sick—and crazy to boot, Eagan reached for his 'phone and called the yard office.

"G'wan home, Billy," he said, in

unbelievably gentle tones for a master mechanic; "I'll call a man in your place."

But Billy protested.

"Eagan, I tell you I ain't sick. Never felt better in my life. I haven't missed a trip in seven years and I don't want to miss one. All I want is another engine.

"Listen, Eagan." His voice was strained and pleading. "This thing began a week ago, but I never said anything about it. But we've got to pick up two coaches of picnickers today at Banks and take them to Milton. Sunday-school—most of them kids. I don't want to pull them with the 89."

The florid master mechanic studied Billy, a serio-comic expression on his ruddy countenance. Ten years before, Billy had come to the Little Sandy division as a fireman; two and a half years later, had perspired his way to promotion, and was now considered one of the road's most competent and trustworthy employes. Never a demerit mark had been placed after the name of "Billy Hubler."

Eagan considered all those years of faithful service; then the utter absurdity of the engineer's statement concerning the supernatural qualities of the 89. At last he said:

"You've got me, Billy. I don't know whether to feel sorry for you or to kick you out of my office. What's the 89 been doing?"

Billy hesitated, licked his lips and began huskily:

"You won't believe it, Eagan, but I can prove every word of it—by my fireman. The 89 blows her own whistle and rings her own bell. And always after dark. We've been running late for the last two weeks; and last Thursday night—a week ago today—just after dark, when I reached for the cord to whistle a road crossing, she blowed it herself—two longs and two shorts. Not loud and regular, Eagan, but low and dismal. And then she began to ring the bell! The fireman was down putting in a fire and hadn't touched the rope.

"And she's been doing it every evening since," he continued.

"Whistles crossings and stations; calls for semaphores, and once or twice called brakes. I can't understand it, Eagan, unless it's an omen Maybe she's getting ready to smash up something. And them two coaches of Sunday-school kids! We better not risk it!"

Eagan shook his head and consulted his watch.

"Billy," he said, "either you or the 89 have gone bugs—and I guess it's you. But it's too late now to call another man and there's not another engine in the house. You'll have to take her out."

Billy reluctantly returned to the 89, and by alternative pleadings and threats, at last persuaded his fireman to make just one more trip. After they left the yards, Billy leaned out of the cab window and looked the engine over critically. Never had she steamed better, and never, it seemed to him, had she responded more readily to his touch. He gave her another notch and the quick, easy response of the engine dispelled some of his fear.

"Say, Fred," he called at length, "did you examine that bell—tighten

it up a little? I've been thinking that maybe the motion of the engine made it ring—low joints, or something like that, you know."

"No low joints about it," returned the fireman decisively. "I've got that bell fixed so I can hardly ring it myself. And you know what happened last night. Anyhow, low joints wouldn't blow the whistle."

"Well," persisted Billy against deeper convictions, "such a thing could happen. The escape lever could have been loose."

The fireman climbed down from his seat, put in a fire and crossed over to Billy.

"You're trying to kid yourself now, Billy," said he. "You know that you've tinkered with that whistle till it's like throwing the reverse to blow it. Besides, she blows her whistle standing still. You know what happened last night when we were waiting for the semaphore at the T. & D. crossing: she called for it and then answered it when we got it. It wasn't low joints and it wasn't imagination. It gives me the creeps."

Way freight was light that day and at twelve o'clock they were on time to the minute. It began to look as though they would reach the end of the division before nightfall. But shortly after noon it began to rain, an old-fashioned gully-washer, accompanied by gusts of wind that roared against the cab windows and sent sheets of water scudding along the box car tops.

On low country the water rose to a level with the right-of-way and in some places completely submerged it. In cut the loose earth washed down on the track until the rails were entirely hidden from view.

This naturally delayed the local. Being a conservative engineer, and for the past few days obsessed by a growing superstition, Billy felt his way cautiously, with the result that the 89 crawled along at something less than ten miles an hour.

When they reached Banks, where they were to pick up the two coaches of Sunday-school picnickers, night had fallen. One of those heavy, black nights, peculiar to the lull in a storm, when the elements seem to be resting in order to gather strength for another and more violent onslaught. The 89's oil burning headlight was as ineffectual against such darkness as though it shone on a wall of vaporous ink. It sent a pale funnel of light scarcely beyond the engine's pilot.

After the way freight had been unloaded, the two coaches of tired, sleepy children coupled to the rear of the train and the air tested, Billy climbed down and began to oil around.

"We'll stay here for the flyer," he said to the fireman. "Better clean your pans. She's not due for thirty minutes."

Just then a brakeman came running forward, signalling "go ahead" as he ran.

"All right, Billy," he shouted. "Fifteen minutes on thirty-seven. Let 'er by at Milton."

From the condition of the roadbed it was evident that the flier would not be flying. Forty-five minutes was ample time to make Milton. But Billy was taking no chances.

"When you're in doubt," he quoted,

"take the safe course and run no risks. Too many lives back there. Guess I'll stay here."

"Cap. says go," persisted the brakeman. "Plenty of time. He'll look out for the hind end."

When they were out on the main line Billy shook his head.

"I don't like this," he protested. "It ain't railroading."

The brakeman, who had pre-empted the fireman's seat, crossed over and stood behind him.

"What's the matter, Billy?" he grinned. "Not feeling well? If I didn't know you so well I'd think you'd lost your nerve."

"Shut up!" snapped Billy. "You know what's wrong. You've heard it. Now get back there and turn up some retainers so I can re-charge the rain line. I'm going to feel my way down this hill."

The brakeman picked up his lamp and chuckling, disappeared over the coal pile in the tender.

The hill to which Billy referred began at Wyngate, winding down a three per cent. grade to Milton, a distance of some fourteen miles. The roadbed, ballasted with cinders and laid with sixty pound steel, was none too smooth at best, and after a veritable cloud-burst, such as had fallen that afternoon, it would be equal to suicide to proceed faster than eight or ten miles an hour.

They topped the hill and began the descent. Billy shut off steam and let the 89 coast, touching up the air from time to time as the train gained momentum. When he released the brakes to re-charge the train line, the engine shot forward unhindered, bumping uncomfortably over low joints and taking the sharp curves in dangerous plunges.

Each time he tried to re-charge the train line, the 89 would leap forward in a fresh burst of speed. Half way down the hill they were plunging along at forty miles an hour, thirty miles too fast, according to Billy's idea of conservatism.

"Where's that brakeman?" he yelled. "Durn him! He's lying down on us. No retainers up back there."

"Asleep in an empty somewhere," suggested the fireman. "Blow for brakes. Maybe you can wake him up."

Billy reached for the cord, but before his fingers touched it the engine let out a low, dismal blast. His hand fell limp at his side and he turned a white face to the fireman.

"Hear that?" he groaned. "She's at it again."

The fireman left his seat and groped his way across the deck; the 89 was rolling like a ship in a storm.

"Can't you stop her, Billy?" he pleaded. "Another two minutes and we'll be in the ditch."

When they neared the bottom of the hill, the 89 was taking the sharp reverse curves in vicious plunges that lifted her clear of the inside rail and gaining speed at every revolution.

The headlight flashed on a whistling post, and through force of habit, Billy reached to sound the road crossing. As he touched the cord he felt it slacken under his hand, and the brass cylinder moaned two long blasts and two short ones. The bell, silhouetted against the pale reflection of the headlight, swayed slowly, gave a few

desultory taps and again became motionless.

Two white faces searched each other through the yellow light of the cab.

"Go back and set up a few brakes," yelled Billy. "That'll give me a chance to re-charge. We've got to stop 'er!"

The fireman, with an old pick handle for a brake club, scaled the coal pile and made his way toward the dark line of leaping box cars. After what seemed an age, Billy felt a slight tugging from the rear and he knew that the fireman was making vigorous use of the pick handle.

At the foot of the hill began a sharp double reverse curve worming its way through a deep cut in the form of a gigantic "S." A quarter of a mile beyond this curve the track topped a forty-foot embankment, where a ravine had been filled in over a concrete culvert.

With a roar, the 89 plunged into the cut, took the first curve of the "S" in a series of short plunges and was listing for the reverse when, apparently of her own initiative, she shattered the air with a short, shrill scream. Billy's hand fell away from the throttle and he slumped forward, white and shaken. Again the 89 shrilled, and again. The last blast seemed to arouse the engineer from the paroxysm of superstitious fear into which the first had plunged him, and becoming suddenly animated, reached down, threw over the reverse, gave her the last notch and applied the emergency.

Back on the train, the fireman was plying his pick handle with desperate energy. He had succeeded in setting up a half dozen or so brakes, and these, with the rest of the train in emergency and the 89 working a full head of steam on reverse, soon brought the local to a clattering stop.

Billy drew a deep breath of relief. He had intended merely to reduce to a safe speed, but something, he could not tell what, had urged him to come to a full stop; and now that he had followed that unanalytical urge he must find some plausible excuse. Red Larson, the conductor, would be along in a few minutes and demand a reason. When displeased, Red had no regard for his vocabulary, and Billy did not like to quarrel.

He climbed down and began to look about for something tangible upon which to base an explanation, but he could find nothing wrong. The crunch of hurrying feet came to his ears.

"What the devil's wrong, Billy?" yelled a voice with a Swedish accent. It was Red Larson coming forward on the run. "What're you stopping out here for? Thirty-seven's right behind us. We'll get ten days for laying her out!"

Billy did not answer. There was no sensible reason why he had stopped, but something had told him to stop and now that same something was telling him to stay there. He looked hopelessly about. Suddenly he stiffened and pointed a pistol-like finger at the track ahead.

"Good God!" he gasped. "Look there, Larson!"

Larson followed the direction of the pointing finger and felt his heart stop beating. Not fifty feet away, the headlight flung its pallid light over

an abyss of black space where the fill should have been. From beneath, came the splash and roar of rushing water; above, suspended like a horizontal ladder, hung the rails with the spiked ties clinging to them. The fill had gone out.

Billy groped blindly in the air and sat down.

"I'm done!" he said hoarsely. "There's other things a man can do besides run an engine, and I know when I've had enough."

Larson turned away, sick with the realization of an awful tragedy so narrowly averted. Back on the rear of the train, two coaches of tired, helpless children were sleeping happily and safely. A few more turns of the drivers would have plunged them into the foaming water of the fill, and into eternity.

As he began to retrace his steps to the caboose a hand clutched at his arm. It was the brakeman.

"God—Larson!" he gasped, in a thin, shaken voice, "what if I hadn't done it?"

"Done what?" said Larson vaguely, scarcely heeding the other's words.

"Blowed that whistle. I've been climbing on top of the cab when Billy and the fireman wasn't looking and ringing the bell and blowing the whistle—just for a joke—to scare Billy. He was making them curves too fast to-night and I mighty near fell off. And when I blowed for brakes, thinking he'd slow up a little, he shot the whole wad and put 'er over. Lord! what if I hadn't done it!"

Larson's face took on a look of incredulity.

"So you're the bird that's been causing all this trouble, eh?" he asked, his eyes blazing dangerously.

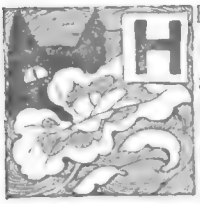
The brakeman gulped and nodded.

"Say," Larson said somewhat regretfully, "if it wasn't for those kids back there, I'd take a knuckle pin and beat your head off. You're coming right along with me and tell Billy Hubler what's been wrong with the 89; and then if he don't kick in a few of your slats, I will. And if you're still alive after I get through with you, I'm going to see that you're so thoroughly fired you'll never dare set foot on the T. L. & V. right-of-way again."

The Falling of a Leaf

BY HAPSBURG LIEBE

He was just a creature of the road—an every day hobo—but even in this gutter snipe's soul burned the fires of sacrifice.



HE had always been an errant coward, and he was intensely human under the surface, and his blue eyes were uncommonly fine; otherwise he seemed a fair type of the average tramp. No piece of his ragged clothing fitted him: his shoes were not mates; he wore a yard of hempen cord for a belt; he wore his battered black felt hat wrong side out to make the rim stay up. His unkempt hair and beard were of the brown chestnut burrs. He didn't remember a father or a mother; if he had ever been named he had forgotten it—when it became necessary for him to have a name he used Breamer because he thought it sounded good. As a child he had been cuffed about by older people in cavernlike alleys; as a boy and a man he had been a wanderer. Always he traveled alone, shunning the society of other tramps; and he carried a tiny bag of asafoetida suspended from his neck to keep away illness.

When the spring was turning into summer, he began to move northward; Florida's sun had become entirely too warm for him, and there were mosquitoes. It was in a little town that nestled among the foothills of Tennessee's mountains that he made bold to call at the home of an old-fashioned minister-doctor for the purpose of finding out whether there was anything serious connected with his cough, shortness of breath, fever in the afternoons and sweating at nights. The minister-doctor was plain. He advised the tramp that he could live four months by going high into the big hills and staying there—provided he could get a daily diet of milk and eggs; he also solemnly advised him to make peace with the hereafter.

Breamer thanked the practitioner and set his worried face toward the piled up, dim-blue mountains that formed the eastern horizon. He was a coward, and he wanted every day of life he could get. The hereafter was a thing he hadn't thought of much; and now that he was forced to think of it he was afraid. There was something terrible, something not to be understood, something black and mysterious about it. He realized his littleness and his utter unimportance as he had never realized it before.

"Me goin'," he said to himself, "matters no more'n a leaf fallin' to the ground."

He wanted to go to the highest mountain, for that meant more days of life to him. The mountain folk directed him to Clingman's Peak, an elevation that afforded a view of five counties.

At mid-afternoon of a fine day in late July he reached the summit and looked down into the lakes of fleecy clouds in the coves below. His uncouth and uneducated spirit leaped within him at the magnificence of the view. He tried to throw out his chest, and his fine blue eyes sparkled. There was something like holiness up here above the world and its madness, above everything.

"Damn!" said Breamer.

"What?" came a voice from the scrubby laurel behind him.

The tramp turned slowly. He saw a well-dressed youth of eighteen, whose intelligent face bore lines of sadness and loneliness.

"I dunno," muttered Breamer.

"I think I understand," smiled the youth. His voice had a musical Southern accent that was very engaging. "All this below. I felt it, too, when I first came up here. I'm not calloused to it, you understand, but—but I have other things to think about. I'm mighty lonesome, you know. I've been up here four weeks—"

"For your health, same as me!" Breamer interrupted. "I've got four months; how long've you got?" He tapped his chest significantly.

The other's eyes widened. "I—I don't know," he answered. "I've got a little hut out on the crest of the mountain a hundred yards, and I've got plenty of things to eat. I go down and buy food from the mountain people about every ten days; if you're hungry, I'll give you something to eat. Are you? You look it."

"Got any eggs and milk?" asked Breamer. "The doctor said I must eat eggs and milk. How the devil am I to get eggs and milk! I'm a damned tramp, y' know. I was so bad scared I never thought o' how I was goin' to eat; I just started for the hills, a lettin' the future take care of itself, as I've always done."

"I've got eggs."

"Please lead the way, Bo. Excuse me for callin' you 'Bo.' I'm used to callin' anybody that. It's a road name." Breamer smiled a little. The two of them, so widely different —as different as the East is from the West, went to the hut. The Southerner apologized for the poorness of his temporary home, and the tramp said it was all right. Breamer ate for the first time that day.

Charley Abbott felt a great sympathy for this derelict the stream of life had thrown at his feet. He gave Breamer his hut, and built for himself a low shelter of hemlock boughs; he gave Breamer a blanket and a few articles of clothing, and he furnished Breamer food. In spite of the high, dry air, the tramp continued to fail rapidly in health. He began to ask young Abbott questions about the other life. Abbott, deeply touched, told Breamer all he knew to tell; then the derelict began to square himself with the hereafter—the black and mysterious hereafter. It was heartbreaking, it was pitiful. His going mattered so little to anybody except himself; it mattered no more than the falling of a leaf.

Why had he lived? He had not asked to come into the world; he had not asked for the responsibility of keeping the immortal spark in the house of clay. He felt rebellious for

a while; then he listened to Charley Abbott's gentle persuasion and resigned himself with a certain vague hopefulness. To him Abbott was a god; he worshipped Abbott; no other person, in all his life, had even been a friend to him.

One afternoon in August Breamer missed his youthful friend. He searched over the crest of the great peak, and failed to find the boy. Breamer walked with a cane now; he limped down the western side of the mountain, during the sunset hour, and found Abbott sitting on a stone, with his head bent to his hands. He went closer and saw lying beside the youth the photograph of a very lovely middle-aged woman, and she was smiling.

Breamer picked up the photograph and looked at it with his fine, hollow blue eyes. He knew little of Abbott's world, or of the ages of women; but he knew this woman was one beloved by his friend, and therefore she was a creature divine. He leaned forward and touched the boy on the shoulder. Abbott looked around quickly, startled; then he smiled faintly and looked toward the golden summer sun.

"Sweetheart?" inquired the tramp.

"Mother," answered the youth. "Infinitely better than any sweetheart, or anybody else. You'll agree with me there, of course."

"I don't know, Charley."

"You don't know!" surprisedly.

"I don't know nothin' about 'em. I never had none, Charley. But they must be somethin' elegant to have. Lots o' time I've wished I had one. I mightn't 'a' been a coward like I've always been; and I mightn't been the nothin' that I am. They sure love a feller, don't they, Charley?"

"They'd die for you, go to the end of the world for you, even suffer ages of torment for you!" Abbott went to his feet and faced the haggard Breamer. "They'd do anything for you! Oh, you've missed the most of life!"

"Is it fair?" breathed the tramp.

"Is what fair?" Abbott wanted to know.

"You've had one, and I didn't. I ain't wishin' you didn't have none, y' understand; I'm just askin' is it fair for one not to have any and another to have one. Is it?"

"I—I don't know," and Abbott shook his head.

"But I ain't goin' to question nothin'," muttered Breamer. "I've done squared myself with the future, and I want to keep square with it. Anyhow, I reckon it's better now that I ain't got one. If I had one, I'd have to die and leave her. Charley, you're sure, are you, that I've got forgiveness for not bein' anything at all in the world?"

"Lord yes!" cried the boy; and he turned his saddened eyes toward the half of the sun that remained above the horizon.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Charley. Because you're educated, and you know what you're talkin' about. It makes a difference. Don't it? It sure does. Say, Charley, I'm sorry for you. Because when you go you'll have to leave her. You never told me what was the matter with you. How long do you expect to live, Charley?"

Abbott turned his gaze downward. "I must ask your pardon, old man," he said deprecatingly. "I deceived you—rather, I allowed you to deceive yourself. I didn't come to the mountains for my health. I came here to keep out of the Georgia State Penitentiary—the law wants me, and I'm in hiding! And I'm not guilty, either. But the circumstances would convict me if I were caught, and I can't risk being caught. I wouldn't mind it so much if I could get letters from home; but the authorities are watching the mails—"

He broke off abruptly. A glad light flitted across the tramp's face; he was glad the one friend of his life was not doomed to die as he was.

"What was it you was accused o' doin'?" he inquired, looking toward young Abbott with idolatrous eyes.

"Killing a man, that's all!" He shrugged his slender shoulders. "It was like this:

"There was only my mother and me. Among the things my father left us there was a silver-mounted revolver, which we treasured much. One night a thief entered our home and carried away this revolver and a diamond ring and a purse with a little money in it.

"Now there was in my town, living not far from us—we lived in North Atlanta—a certain rich man whom I have always hated because he swindled my father out of a fine tract of cotton lands when I was a child. The thief who stole the silver-mounted revolver, guided by a mean Fate, entered the house of the rich man on the same night, was surprised, killed the rich man and left the weapon lying beside him. I learned of it barely in time to get away. I knew I didn't dare to stay there and let the law catch me; I knew I couldn't risk standing trial with that evidence against me. And so I came here, and that is all."

"It's enough," muttered Breamer. "And so she don't know where you're at! And I'll bet you she's worried nearly to death about you. Charley, I think I'd better go down to Atlanta and tell her you're all right. Don't you think I had?"

The youth straightened, and his nether lip jerked a trifle.

"How I thank you for that!" he cried; and it sounded loud in the stillness of the everlasting hills. "But you couldn't. You're too weak, my good friend. You'd never make it. If I had money to pay your railroad fare—but I haven't—I'm pretty close to broke. After the interest in the thing has died down—next summer, perhaps—I can steal in home and see her."

"I believe I could make it," Breamer declared.

"No!" Abbott's eyes took in the tramp's thin figure, his hollow cheeks, his haggardness. "No! Tramps are beaten and cuffed, and it's a rather long journey to Atlanta. But I'm grateful to you. I assure you I'm grateful to you."

The sun had entirely hidden itself. Breamer looked toward the lakes of shadows that were fast gathering in the coves below.

"It's getting late, Charley," he said. "It's a good half a mile to the top. Hadn't we better go?"

"Yes, we'd better go."

Together they went to the summit.

An hour later the full moon came up. When it had almost reached its zenith the tramp rose from his bed of poles and stole to the doorway of the hut. He could hear Charley Abbott's deep breathing, and he knew the lad was sound asleep. Breamer went soundlessly to the shelter of green branches, and there stood looking down upon the saddened boyish face. Beside Abbott lay the picture of his mother; Breamer stooped and took it up with both hands. In the light of the moon the two faces seemed much alike, somehow. Again Breamer's fine, hollow blue eyes shone with the light of idolatry. A moment later he thrust the photograph inside the shirt Charley had given him, went back to the hut for his hat and the cane he had come to use; then he made his way toward the foot of the mountain men call Clingman's Peak.

He was going to Atlanta. He could find her by the picture—he could be sure that way. He was going to tell her that Charley was all right. What did it matter if he shortened his days by this extremely hard undertaking? His going was no more than the falling of a leaf. Charley had said that he was square with the hereafter, and Charley knew! He felt good in his heart.

Breamer was twenty days on the journey to Atlanta. Trainmen seemed more watchful and more opposed to accommodating tramps than ever. All the cunning that used to win him long rides now was futile. When he slipped from the side of a car loaded with machinery to the ground in the outskirts of Atlanta, he was so weak that he fainted. It was broad daylight when he came to. He crawled to a narrow ditch filled with muddy water and bathed his face and hands,that he might appear a little more respectful to Charley's mother; then he moved slowly toward North Atlanta.

It proved to be a more difficult search than he had thought. She found him the next day at almost sundown. He had stopped against a gatepost of granite, and was peering up a gravel walk that led to a broad verandah beyond a setting of gnarled trees that hid the upper part of a fine old house. Things were dim; they swam before his eyes; he felt that he must fall, that he must die without accomplishing the one mission of his worthless life. He clutched the granite post with both hands and leaned his face against it. It was then that the little old gray woman came down and caught him by an arm.

He knew her instantly. "It's you!" he muttered hoarsely. "At last, it's you—and Charley's all right, ma'am! Yes, ma'am. He's up in Tennessee—hidin' on top of a big mountain—named Clingman's Peak. And he's—all right!"

"Thank God!" happily. "You're ill! Come—let me help you to the house; a doctor lives next door, and we'll call him in to see you."

She helped him to a comfortable chair on the verandah, and sent a servant for the doctor who lived next door.

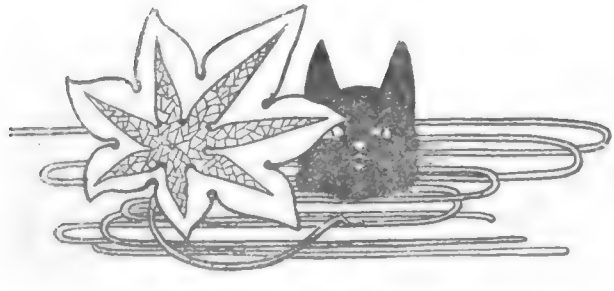
And while they were waiting for the physician, Breamer told her, a few words at a time, of his life, of his illness, of his meeting with her son.

The woman went pale as a full realization of what he had done broke upon her mind. She knew that he had shortened his little lease of life much; that he was very near to the iron door of death, where all men are equal, where the billionaire is a pauper. Impulsively, lovingly, gratefully, she bent and pressed her lips to his grimy forehead. Breamer's spirit fluttered up in response, and a joy too great to be understood filled his heart. What a reward it was! The one kiss he had ever known! Oh, if he could do something else for her—if he could give back her boy to her—if he would swear a lie with his dying breath he could do it! But that would destroy his peace with the hereafter!

Charley's mother took one of his hands and caressed it. There was a quick step on the gravel walk, and a moment later a tall, gray man appeared at his side.

"Too late, old sawbones—I'm all in," gasped Breamer. "Listen. A few months ago—I stole a pistol from this house—and killed a man—in another house! I—come—back to—confess. Hold up—my right hand—there! I swear it, so—help—me—God!"

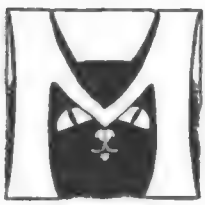
Breamer's spirit went out to eternity a perjured soul for the sake of that which he had never had. A maple leaf as yellow as gold fluttered downward and lay still in Breamer's limp, open right hand; but neither the woman nor the doctor saw anything unusual in that; the leaves were always falling.



A Day in the Dark

BY BERTON BRALEY

To put atmosphere into a rejected story an author plays blind for a day. Read what he learns.



MARSTON awoke with a dull headache and a somewhat blurred vision. Spots floated before his eyes. He crawled out of bed and viewed himself in the mirror.

"Ugh!" he observed dispassionately to his image, "when will you get a little sense? And why *will* you sit up until four o'clock in the morning watching the cards go around and around and around, and smoking and drinking until you give yourself a good fat lusty attack of indigestion! Never again." He raised his right hand on high—"until the next time," he finished lamely.

He shook his head like a swimmer coming up after a dive, and began vigorously exercising to drive the fog out of his brain and the sogginess out of muscles and nerves. By the time he had finished and jumped under his stimulating shower, the dullness and heaviness of the morning after had departed. He was hungry for breakfast and ready for work.

His eyes bothered him a bit when he settled down to his writing, and again he cursed himself for sitting and staring at a card table and poker hands most of the night before. Presently, however, as they became adjusted to the task before them, his eyes ceased to trouble him, and he found himself working with a vim and enthusiasm he had not felt for many days. He became so absorbed, in fact, that when the bell rang and his man servant ushered in Arnold Harper, he looked up from his manuscript with a puzzled stare.

"Hello, Arnold," he said, "what do you mean by coming here so damn early. You're not invited until lunch!"

'Well," said Harper, tossing his hat into a corner, and throwing himself in a big chair, "it *is* lunch time. I'm even a bit late. It's one thirty. Guess you've been working pretty hard."

"I was interested in the job," replied Marston, shoving aside his papers and lighting a cigarette. "It's the first work I've done with any real enthusiasm for weeks. Been having liver and indigestion and things like that. Made me dull and logy—headaches and other such troubles. My own fault—feverish and unnatural life of excitement, you know. Last night I violated the rules of health again—and in recompense I'm feeling fine, thank you. What's that you've got in your hand?"

"Rejected manuscript, I guess," smiled Harper. "It's mail for you I found downstairs just before I came up. I brought it along."

"It's that story about the man who

went blind," said Marston. "I can't seem to sell it. Too somber, maybe."

"I'll tell you why *we* didn't buy it," suggested Harper, "and its somberness had nothing to do with it. It didn't ring true. It was told in the first person and it somehow did not read as though the man telling it ever knew what it was to be blind for even ten minutes."

Marston rose and led the way to the little bachelor dining room.

"Maybe you're right," he said as they seated themselves, "but I don't see why. A man doesn't have to be a burglar to write a burglar story. Why need he be blind to write a blind man tale? Imagination is all you need. We all have the dread of going blind. You've had it; I've had it; that, plus imagination, ought to make truth—and my story is made that way."

"Perhaps," conceded Harper, "but if you blindfolded yourself for one solid day and played blind, I'll wager you'd write a different sort of tale."

"That's an idea," cried Marston, unexpectedly complaisant. "I've half a mind to try it. I'll begin right after lunch—and with Harkins's help (Harkins was the man servant) I'll play blind until tomorrow morning—and I'll try to follow my usual routine and do my usual work as well."

"Pardon me, sir," Harkins deprecatingly offered, "but while I'm quite willing, I'm not sure that it is a wise idea. Seems like playing with fate, sir, if you don't mind my saying so."

"No, I don't mind your saying so, but I'm going to try the stunt, nevertheless, and I'll bet you anything you like, Harper, that I won't want to change a line in that story tomorrow. Come on, make it a bet," he urged.

Harper laughed, but when he left for his office, he had agreed to pay Marston twenty-five dollars if the author did not want to change a line of his story the next day. Harper was quite sure of Marston's honesty and ethics, manifestly.

For his part, Marston bought a large black handkerchief and bound it about his eyes. Finding that this did not completely shut out the light, he had Harkins make some black pads to go over each eye separately, and when the handkerchief was tied over these, the darkness was total. And thus the day of blackness began. Marston decided to finish, if possible, the work he had begun in the morning, but to do this it was evident he must have a stenographer. He felt his way to the telephone and by force of habit picked up the directory from the table. Then he threw it down with an exclamation. "Harkins," he called, "please look up the Royal Stenographic Agency for me." As he took up the receiver, placed it to his ear and sat waiting for his number, he felt a soft warmth on his hand. "Ah," he said, "the sun has come out, hasn't it, Harkins? I felt it on my hand."

"Yes, sir, you are right," Harkins corroborated him, "it's turning out to be a very bright sunny day, sir."

"Hello! Royal Stenographic? Can you send me a good stenographer to take dictation direct on the typewriter? Yes, immediately. This is Frederick Marston, 114 Buldon Street. Thank you—in half an hour, you say?"

He hung up and groped his way to his desk chair. Rather mechanically he reached for one of the magazines which usually lay on the desk, then dropped his hands in his lap with a short laugh. Of course, he couldn't read. That manner of filling up brief waits was denied him. There were a number of inconveniences to being blind besides that of the mere darkness, which was oppressive. "Light me a cigarette, Harkins," he ordered.

The cigarette was lighted and placed in his hand, and even carefully guided to his mouth by his capable servant. Marston took a long puff. "I say, Harkins," he remarked, "you didn't light this confounded thing."

"Oh yes, sir," responded the servant, "I did."

"But it doesn't taste at all," declared Marston. He gingerly felt of the end of the cigarette and snatched his finger away with a little yelp—the tobacco was alight, sure enough.

"H'm," he mused, "h'm! Tobacco doesn't taste much when you can't see. I never noticed *that* before."

Already, in the scant fifteen minutes he had been wearing the blindfold he had discovered several things about blindness he had never before considered. He resolved on a number of changes in that story. Still, he would go through the day—the experience would be valuable to him.

When the stenographer arrived and sat down at the machine, he discovered that dictating, unless you were used to it, was not the easiest task in the world. And after he had spoken a sentence or two and the stenographer repeated them, he found himself reaching for the sheets to see how the words looked as well as how they sounded. He was momentarily tempted to tear off the blindfolds, pay the bet, alter the story and let it go at that. But he didn't.

Somehow he stumbled through to the end of the tale he had been working on in the morning. Then, with the blackness hanging heavily over him—it was already oppressive, it actually seemed to burden him palpably—he began divesting himself of his smoking coat and the white linen trousers he usually wore at work, and getting into a street suit. Harkins stood ready to help, but Marston fumbled about in the closet and among the drawers to see how successfully he could accomplish the clothing process without assistance. He couldn't; and presently, in despair, he submitted to the ministrations of Harkins, who dressed him properly.

"Is it still sunny?" asked Marston anxiously.

"Yes, sir," replied the servant, "very bright and sunny out. It's the kind of a day you like, sir.

"Shall I get a taxi, sir?"

"No," said Marston; "you go with me and guide me to the club. I want to talk to some of the men. I'll tell 'em my eyes are a little on the blink and that it's doctor's orders I go blindfolded for twenty-four hours. Gad, but this darkness gets tiresome. I wish I hadn't made such a fool bet. If it were for more than a day, I'd kick and scream, I reckon."

Through the thousand clamors of the street, intensified by the blackness in which he stumbled, Marston was guided by Harkins. The rumble of traffic, the rattle of elevated trains,

the cries of newsboys, all the multifarious noises of the city, smote him on every side, and his path seemed full of vast and looming terrors, of threatening disasters and of strange currents and cross currents of sound and of wind and of feeling, that made his heart sink and his hand shake. The rush and swirl of the streets seemed a monstrous thing to him, now that sound and feeling had to supply the lack of that sense which he had temporarily denied himself.

In the club, too, he found that men's voices, without the accompanying facial expressions, lacked personality and character. They didn't seem even as vivid and human as they would over the telephone, where imagination somehow supplied an individuality which was lacking in this talk in the dark.

He had heard that blindness always intensified the acuteness of the other senses, and so far as their practical use was concerned this seemed to him true. Sounds assumed a new significance, and faint air currents, the feel of the carpets, or the steps under his feet, the texture of the chair on which he sat, the weight and smoothness of the glasses out of which he drank—all these became of importance, though always before accepted as without interest.

But when it came to the more delicate and pleasurable sensations, they were dulled, he thought, by the darkness in which he had placed himself. Drink and food had less tang to them, the flowers lacked poignancy in their scent, and the blackness weighed heavier every minute.

Night came—he went to the theatre, but Harkins led him away after one act. "I can't stand that sort of thing any longer," cried Marston; "this blackness is getting intolerable. And to sit there and hear people firing lines across at each other, and not to see the business or the action or the scenery—it's maddening; it's impossible; it's a nightmare. Take me home, Harkins, and put me to bed. I'll leave this confounded bandage on and tear it off in the morning. I was going to see—call on Agnes after the third act of the play she's in, but you'll have to 'phone the theater that I'm sick and can't be there.

"Not even for five minutes could I bear being with her and not seeing her. And what right would a blind man—even in masquerade—have to a wonderful woman like her? She's a glorious woman, Harkins, and you must take good care of her when we're married. Now take me home and put me to bed. This blackness is crushing me. But I'll certainly have to rewrite that story tomorrow."

Marston woke smiling. He tore the bandage from his eyes. The room was dark. He removed the patches.

"Harkins," he cried, "are you up?"

"Yes, sir," answered his servant, entering the room.

"What time is it?"

"Eight o'clock, sir, and a beautiful sunny morning."

"Why don't you put up the shades then, and let some light in here?"

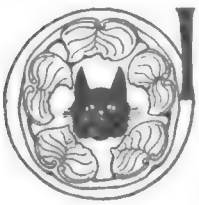
Harkins stifled an exclamation. Then, like the well-trained servant he was, he answered:

"Beg pardon, sir, but the shades are up!"

Jud Perkins Tackles Philately

BY HAROLD DE POLO

"Never play the other man's game," should be writ deep in the minds of all who come easy by life—but it isn't!



I WAS coming out of one of the numerous Twenty-third Street stamp dealers when I ran full tilt into my old friend Jud Perkins, whose business in life was striving mightily, and with pride, to keep his grafting down to what he dubbed the "painless variety" level.

"What's it been lately?" I asked him. "Haven't seen you for a good six months or more!"

"Bound to revolutionize the American and foreign household. Combination can-opener, knife-sharpener, fish-scaler, glass-cutter, bottle-opener, cork extractor, hammer, chisel, screw-driver and bread-knife; all—including a bottle of the finest and rarest perfume used only by the favorites of the Sultan's harem—*all* for the small and unbelievable price of a quarter—one little American two-bit piece, ladies! Didn't work as it ought to have, though; guess some of the patent-medicine boys have been working the territory dry. Therefore—consequently *and* naturally—I had to go back to the old game they all fall for, the rubes and the wise guys, in order to cop the necessary to get back with—the little old shell stunt where they always think, and always will think, that the eye is quicker than the hand—but—but, say," he broke out, as he looked behind him and noticed from whence I'd made my exit, "you—you ain't one of them philatelic bugs?"

There was real pain in his voice and I kindly set him at ease at once. "Not guilty. Just buying a few sets for my kid nephew!"

Jud breather easier. "Stamps is a great little game—what?" reflected Jud soberly, taking a nervous pull at his mustache.

"From which I infer?"

"Sure. Buy me one," he agreed, looking up the street.

I did. In fact, I bought him three. And this is the yarn he told me as we stood against the mahogany collecting brass on the soles of our shoes.

"Philately? Sure I've tried the game—an' a noble little pastime it is, if you'll allow me to so remark. It was just after my last trip in the Middle West when my combination can-opener and bottle of the harem's favorite perfume fell dead flat and I had to turn to the old reliable shell game. After I'd put some eleven century notes into my jeans in the course of a few weeks' time—an' that besides splittin' up with the mayors an' sheriffs an' constables—I sort of tired of takin' it so easy-like an' decided to hit it out for another section an' take a look at somethin' more interestin' as

well as lucrative. I remembered that a green-goods man once told me that Rochester was a nice little burg, an' when you can sell the green stuff you can usually handle most anything—even minin' stocks an' apple or orange land in Oregon an' Florida, respectively! Also, I've always had kind of a ardent desire within me to visit new climes an' places. It broadens the mind if nothin' else, an' it's always sure to affect the pocket one way or another. So to Rochester I forthwith proceeds.

"Yes, it's a real nice, cute little town, for it was there I had my taste of philately, an' not many moons ago. I was holdin' down one of the big leather easies in the hotel lobby, my first night there, with a fifty-cent Panatella in my teeth an' feelin' quite liberal an' plutocratic with the knowledge that I still had ten centuries in my clothes as well as a few of the smaller fry. Oh, yes, I was real sorry for the inhabitants thinkin' of how I was goin' out in the mornin' an' clean out the town—apple land, I was thinkin' of, for I had a lot of old beautiful readin' matter on the subject that I hadn't entirely worked off on my last fling at the game. Yep, I even had to fight with myself not to start off that very night with the bell-boys an' waiters an' clerk! They looked like a gentle bunch of suckers!

"As I was settin' there puffin' an' smilin' to myself at what a pretty little place the world was, I noticed a good-sized load get off one of the elevators an' come amblin' along, all in a bunch, talkin' an' jabberin' in low an' what you might call excited tones. Then comes a few more loads. They was queer lookin' cusses—sort of 'artistic temperament' touch to 'em, only more so. Then one of 'em—a long, skinny, sandy-haired an' innocent-faced youngster he was—comes an' flops himself down beside me, pulls out a little red book, an' starts thumbin' it with feverish an' pent-up excitement, as you'd put it. At last he must have come to the page he was lookin' for, for he sits there gazin' at some little pictures with tears comin' from his eyes' an' sighs escapin' from his lips.

"Bein' soft-hearted—*an'* curious—I couldn't stand it no longer. 'Sonny,' I says, gentle-like—he couldn't a been a day over eighteen—'some great affliction has been visited upon you. Confide in me, my boy, for my whole bosom throbs with sympathy. I, too, have suffered the slings an' arrows of outrageous fortune—come, tell me of your pain!'

"The youngster seemed like he didn't hear me. He let's out a great sigh an' sort of speaks under his breath: 'Three Brattleboro's! Three *genuine Brattleboro's!*'

"I sort of looked around for his keeper; then I remembers that bunch that might have been insane alienists: 'Johnny,' I asks softly, 'didn't you get lost from that crowd of nice, kind gentlemen that was takin' you out to see the little town?'

"At that he kinda comes to himself. He closes his book with a little snap an' turns round with a blush on his fair cheeks an' what you might term a sheepish look in his big round blue eyes: 'That—that is the New York State Philatelic Society. They—we have just had one of

our half-yearly meetings. I—I have only just been, just now, elected a member. I—you see, I'm fairly young for the honor!' Here he blushes violently an' becomingly; but right after he gets that crazy look in his eyes. 'But think—just think—one of the members had three Brattleboro's!—*three—genuine—Brattleboro stamps!*'

"I realized that the boy wasn't dangerous—just one of them harmless stamp nuts. 'Sonny,' I says, polite an' willin' to admit my ignorance, 'I've played 'em at every track in the country an' I've even got the bush battin' averages down on my finger tips, but I'll hand it to you for puttin' over some new dope! I just don't get you, Steve!'

"The youngster was real nice about it. 'Of course, sir,' he says, 'you can't be blamed at all, sir. It's apparent that you've never been interested in philately!' An' he laughs one of them clean laughs that's called boyish an' I see his eyes twinkle with genuine amusement, as you might say.

"'Sonny,' I admitted, 'you win. It's a new ball to me with a hop on it I never seen!'

"Then he starts to explain, an' that hungry, crazy look gets into his eyes. 'Why, you see, sir, it's this way. This Brattleboro stamp was used only in Brattleboro, Vermont, quite a few years ago. Of course, they were all used up and now the few that have been saved for us, found on old envelopes, have brought a tremendous price. They are very, very rare—and just think, sir, of one man having three! Just imagine, sir—three beautiful, perfect specimens of the original Brattleboro stamp!' With that he thumbs over his book again, jerks it open at the right page, an' points to a little picture that says on it, 'Brattleboro, Vermont—postage, 2 cents!' 'Just imagine, sir—three of those beauties, all with wonderful cancellations—yes, sir, the most wonderful specimens known to exist! Three of them—*three of them!* Oh, it's the one and only thing that I want in the world!' An' again comes that painful sigh.

"'What—what did you say they was worth, Johnny?' I inquires.

"He points to the price opposite the picture: 'Six hundred dollars apiece, sir, as you see! Oh, if I only had one I could die happy!' Oh, yes, he sure had it bad, I thought.

"Yep. An' there it was in cold, hard black an' white—six hundred big American iron men for one of them darn little bits of paper that once cost two cents an' was slapped, offhand an' careless, onto a ordinary envelope!

"'Philately,' I murmurs, lightin' my cigar that had gone dead, 'might truthfully be termed a expensive little hobby—eh?'

"Again he sighs. 'Yes—yes, it is, sir! I—it's too high for me—too high to be able to get the more valuable stamps, although father has been interested in my collection and has given me lots of good ones. But, oh, if I only had that Brattleboro stamp! You see, I'm more interested in the United States than in foreign countries—I specialize in it, in fact, and that Brattleboro is one of the hardest to get!' Then he seems to brighten up a little, an' sort of lowers his

voice an' winks at me. 'But I'll get it yet, sir—I'll get it yet, all right, all right, and won't pay any six hundred for it, either. Just—just you wait until I finish school and get making money. Then I'm going over to Brattleboro and spend a week or so there—just you wait, just you wait!' He winks again, both eyes this time, an' sort of chuckles like a kid thinkin' of how the teacher will look when he sits on the tack in the chair!

"'That so?' says I, just to be agreeable.

"'Yes, sir, it is—it certainly is! I tell you that I'm sure that around Brattleboro—chiefly way off in the backwoods and on the old farms,—there must be many a good valuable stamp, and a genuine Brattleboro among them, lying in some old trunk or box on a bundle of letters. Yes, sir, I'm sure of it—and when I get the money to get there I intend doing so!' Again comes that wink an' he looks real blissful dreamin' of the thing.

"I begins to take interest, sort of. Then I thinks. 'Say, sonny, if them little pieces of paper come so high, ain't it just possible that some of the wise guys in this philately line has been out an 'cut the bacon?'

"'Yes, sir,' he comes back prompt, 'but I still firmly believe that there's a big chance— a mighty fine chance—at some of those old backwoods places! Yes, sir, I do—I do and I'm going to try it when I get the money, I—but, my'—he stops an' looks up at the clock, "xcuse me, but it's certainly time I was getting home, father will be worried. I'm—I'm very glad to have met you, sir, and assure you that I've very much enjoyed talking to you about my hobby. Good night, sir!'

"I always did have sportin' blood in me—also, I ain't exactly averse to what you might call a new an' painless way of pickin' up a bunch of change. 'Jest a minute, sonny, if you don't mind,' I says. 'What—how would you like to take a little trip to this Brattleboro place with me?'

"His eyes goes kinda crazy. 'What—what do you—do you mean, sir?' he asks, his voice excited.

"I comes back, like you'd put it, concisely. 'I mean this, Johnny. Suppose we take a little choo-choo ride up to this Brattleboro stamp place an' look the situation over? Now, I've got the cold iron men for the journey an' for the business—you come along an' help look up the stuff an' see that it's the real article. If we can get any from them backwoods rubes we'll take 'em an' sell 'em an' split up on the game, see? Oh, yes, you'll be able to have the prize baby for your little collection, too, sonny! How about it, kid?'

"'Oh—oh— I'd—*I'd love to,* sir—I—' Then his face kinda falls. 'But—but I'll have to ask my father first, sir. You see, I haven't finished high school yet, but as it's my vacation he may not mind; and—and he's interested in my collection, too. Oh, yes, sir, I'm sure he won't object! But oh, just think of getting a genuine Brattleboro!' An' he stands there with his eyes big an' joyous.

"'Well, sonny,' I breaks in, wakin' him from his happy dream, 'better find out about it pronto!'

"'I'll ask father the minute I get

home, sir, and let you know the first thing in the morning. Oh, yes, I'm *sure* he'll let me, sir—I'm sure! But —but think of at last being able to get a genuine Brattleboro—just think of it, sir! Oh, but I *must* be getting along—father will be worried to death. Dear me, he must be even now. I'll let you know right in the morning, sir. Good night. But, oh—who shall I ask for at the desk, sir?.....All right. Good night, Mr. Perkins—thank you, thank you!'

"Well, to come down to cases, the next night me an' the kid slept in a Brattleboro hotel—I slept, at least, but the kid seemed so all-fired ex-ited that he woke me up a few times talkin' to himself about those darn little pieces of paper.

"The next day we starts things goin'. I hired a moth-eaten horse an' buggy an' ambled along the rural scenery sellin' my combination can-opener, et cetera—a few of which I still packed with me. Casual-like, at each place, the kid would pipe up as we was leavin', 'Oh, Pop, see if the man has any stamps for my collection—please, Pop!'

"I'd rumble one of them good-natured 'indulgent parent' laughs an' explain that my boy was savin' stamps an' ask em if they didn't maybe have some on any old letters or stuff that was layin' about. Most of 'em had, all right, but after lookin' 'em hurriedly over we'd see they wasn't our speed an' give 'em a few bits for 'em just to get the name of being agreeable. The kid, after a week, seemed gettin' kind of sad; but he explained that it was because he'd guessed wrong an' put me to all my expense an' trouble for nothin'! I admit I myself was gettin' kinda peeved as the time went by an' we didn't strike pay dirt. Also, that kid got mopin' an' talkin' about how guilty he felt an' it began to get on my nerves. He was blubberin' about it all the day an' night, at last!

"Then, after we'd been at it for nearly two weeks, the bacon seems to come into view on a little old farm back about twenty miles in the tall timber. The ancient, totterin' gink had been some interested in my can-opener, but had refused to drop because he didn't believe in partin' with two bits when he didn't jest have to, he explained. Just as we was goin' away the kid ups with his regular question. In turn I braces the old hayseed.

"'What'll ye pay fer 'em?' he asks right off the reel, admittin' that he might have a few of 'em on some old letters.

"'Trot em out,' I tells him, 'an' let me give 'em the once over!'

"He brings out a old bundle from a tin box in the closet an' hands 'em over. Lookin' over the kid's shoulder, I see there wasn't no good ones, so just to keep good feelin's we offers him two bits. The old horse kicked for four of 'em, by the Lord, but when he saw I wouldn't bite he takes the two. Then, the moment he gets it into his hand, he cackles that he'd a-taken a nickle fer em, by gum. An' so he keeps crowin' like he'd done somethin' great!

"Just as we was gettin' into the buggy, though, he calls out to us: 'Say, mister, be ye in need o' any more o' them things? I—I recklect, by gum, thet I got a few more

o' them old letters that Jane writ me when I was a-sparkin' her years ago. Lor', yes, I got a bundle that was writ afore you was born, I should reckon! But—but ye can't have 'em fer a quarter—no, sir; they be older, b'gosh, an' I reckon I know enough to know thet they be wuth more money fer bein' older—ha, ha, ha!'

"'All right. Bring 'em out an' let's look at 'em,' I tells him, though not feelin' the least bit hopeful. Lord, hadn't I bucked the same thing many a time a day for nearly two Godforsaken weeks?

"It takes him about ten minutes to beat it upstairs an' drag out a bunch of dirty letters from a old trunk—but I wouldn't 'a' cared at the time, if it'd 'a' taken him ten hours. He hands the bundle over to the youngster an' watches us closely. At the third letter, right there in the corner, I see one of them damned little stamps that brings six hundred big American iron men.

"The kid sees it, too. 'Oh, oh, look, Mr. Perkins,' he sings out, forgetful-like, an' with that nutty look comin' to his eyes, 'a genuine Brattleboro—a genuine Brattleboro and a perfect spe——'

"But then he feels my kick under the chair an' he stops. I noticed, though, that the old codger had apparently caught on— an' also that he must 'a' wondered at the kid callin' me 'Mr. Perkins.' Well, we goes quickly over the whole bunch in a hurry—an', even though we saw six more like that first one, I managed to hold the boy down. His hands, though, was tremblin' like they'd shake to pieces an' his face was white an' workin'!

"'I'll admit they *are* a trifle better'n the other,' I says to the old gink, honest-like, 'an' here's a simoleon fer the bunch!' Sayin' which, I slips him the bill, puts the bundle into my pocket off-hand, an' tells sonny that we'd better be gettin' back to town.

"But the old gazabo laughs one of his high, dry cackles: 'Jest—jest a minute, stranger,' he drawls, cool-like, 'I reckon I *might* look like a id-jit, see?—but I don't be one alto-gether! Ha, ha, ha! Oh, no, I know all about you wise city fellers out lookin' fer easy money—but this time yer pardner—yer little sonny, eh? gives himself away too gosh blamed easy, stranger! Oh, no, ye don't fool me this time, b'gum! Here's yer money, friend. I gotta git tu town in a day er two, an' I kin kinda ask around then—gimme them letters, stranger! Oh, no, I reckon ye ain't quite so smart's ye thought ye wuz, eh? Ha, ha, ha, ha!'

"I shrugs my shoulder an' pulls out another dollar from my pocket. 'Oh, all right, uncle,' I says, laughin', 'here's another bill. You can have the two of 'em! So long!'

"He comes back quiet: 'No, thank ye, stranger—two hundred ain't quite enough!'

"I starts an' lamps him like he was crazy; then I laughs like I was seein' the joke. 'Two hundred—ha, ha! Good joke, eh? But here, my friend, what do you want, eh? I've got to get along?'

"'I mean it when I says two hundred ain't enough,' he returns, firm an' icy-like!

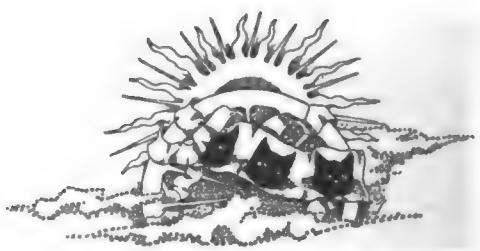
"Well, to come right down to cases

an' to a end in my little high flyer in philately, after about a hour an' a half of hard work I finally gets the bundle—but it cost me a cool seven hundred little American's to do it! Yes, sir, seven hundred real American iron men—an' I only had just a little under eight! Lord, but didn't that poor kid seem broke up about makin' the slip he did! I honestly was feelin' sorry for him then—but thinkin' of the six hundred iron men apiece I told him to take his pick an' cheer up!

"The next day, bright an' early, so to speak, I quits the sleeper an' jumps in a taxi at the Grand Central an' tells the gink to plug for Scotts' like he was breakin' the speed record. I had the six little stamps tucked gentle-like away in a envelope an' was feelin' real sorry for the kid's innocent trust in me when I'd told him I'd send him his share of the booty. Anyway, I'd eased my conscience by thinkin' he'd got hold of a stamp he'd been bugs for an' that he was really too young, anyway, to appreciate the exact value of U. S. currency!

" 'Will you kindly lamp them little pieces of paper an' give me an estimate?' I says, cool-like an' haughty as I hands the things to the feller behind the counter.

"He obliged me real quick an' prompt. 'Yes sir,' he comes back, not flickerin' an eyelash, 'with pleasure, sir! They're about the best counterfeits of the Brattleboro stamp that I've ever had the good fortune to examine!'



Andrew Goes Driving

BY WILL H. GREENFIELD

The big city offers its comedy and tragedy daily but here's an unusual combination of both presented in the last act of a floater's life.

FULTON slumped disconsolately into a seat on the park bench and stared moodily at his shoe tips, the cheap turkish cigarette between his fingers burning its noisome way unheeded to the imitation cork end. In his outworn mind one fact stood out like a blotch of soot on a snowbound waste: as a reporter he was a failure, insurgent but none the less flat. All the world seemed gray and uninhabitable, the future a palindrome that spelled despair.

"Cheer up, kid!" said a voice at his side. "Did the city ed. throw bad words at you and tell you he didn't want a Homeric college essay on the burning of Rome because he sent you for a story of the mysterious fire at some Cohen's second-hand store? Cheer up! Cherries were never riper!"

An angry wave of resentment swept over Fulton, then died out completely as he surveyed the speaker, who was mutely pointing to a roll of mussed copy paper that peeped from his coat pocket. An elderly man he was, with a mouth that knew how to smile and eyes that were saliently human; with gray hair and mustache, and a bulbous nose that sadly detracted from a certain air of refinement otherwise apparent in his appearance.

"I was a leg artist before the booze got me," vouchsafed the stranger, and something like a sob twitched his throat and got away from him, hard as he tried to stop it.

"It's glorious work," testified Fulton affably, "but I'm afraid I'm not going to make good. Our city editor is an old fossil."

"So am I. My name's Andrew. What's your paper?"

"Morning Trumpet. My name's Fulton—Donald Fulton. Glad to know you, Mr. Andrew."

"Just plain Andrew, if you please. It's not my right handle, you know." His gimlet eyes screwed into Fulton's while he was talking. "But it is a good name, borne by the hero of New Orleans. And there was another Andrew, the fisherman, brother of the excellent Peter. His record was also good, in distinct and monumental variance to my own." As he finished speaking his eyes took on the tense vacancy of memory straining against the leash of years.

"What's the matter with you and your work?" he asked after a time.

"Fell down on a fire, got the devil and was told to go out and not return without a human interest story."

Andrew sat motionless for a space, apparently watching the dissolving splendors of the western sky.

"How's this?" he said, and rattled on: "As a socializer, an equalizer, a leveler of rank, the one touch of human nature that makes the whole world kin, there's nothing like our national game. Show that base-ball chatter is the open sesame to the conversational wells of the proud and haughty. Take a Wall Street magnate. Would he stand for any talk about the war in Europe, or the high cost of living or the state of the weather? Never! But simply say, 'It is time the home team took a brace,' and he'll beam on you like an old maid getting her first proposal and talk like a graphophone."

Fulton hitched himself forward to the edge of the bench and clapped the old man on the knee.

"That's fine!" he cried. "I'm going to the office and turn that in. Here!" He pressed an infinitely more applausive half dollar into Andrew's sweaty palm, and jumping to his feet swung into the quickening dusk.

Next morning Andrew wandered slowly along Broadway. A desert thirst was in his throat, his mouth was blistered by the debauch of the previous night and his whiskey-shattered muscles shook like stricken leaves. In a sort of dream he stopped to shake hands with a bustling young man who hailed him with manifest pleasure.

"Andrew," said Fulton's cheery voice, "run along with me, will you? Old Grinder was immensely pleased with that little special I wrote last evening and I—"

"Where you going now?" rasped Andrew in a flat, uninterested voice.

Fulton hurriedly explained that he had been assigned to get a boarding-house murder on Forty-ninth Street, on the shoddy side of Broadway.

"Give me the price of a drink," said Andrew. "I'll see you tonight in the park."

That night, on the same bench where they had opened their acquaintance, Fulton and Andrew met again.

"Tomorrow night," said Andrew, "I'll have a fine story for you, but you'll have to come after it. Down at Cooney's saloon, where I hang out, there's a contractor who believes in ghosts. He often buys me drinks, but I couldn't help laughing at him when he said he knew of a house in a nearby street that was haunted. I'll give you the material for something like 'A Night in a Haunted House.'"

"I don't know whether I can make anything out of it," said Fulton dubiously. "It's rather stale, don't you think?"

"This one will have plenty of frills," said Andrew. "The contractor is to give me twenty-five dollars if I enter the dining room of this haunted house at nine tomorrow night. Confidentially, I may take it in my head to fool around a bit and work up something good for you."

"All right, then," said Fulton. "Look for me at Cooney's tomorrow night."

Fulton was at Cooney's saloon early enough, but Andrew was already drunk. The bartender knew of the wager and introduced Fulton to the contractor when the latter came in.

"Daniels here," said the bartender, "got to telling a blood-curdling story the other night about a haunted house on a little street just above here, and

your friend Andrew called him a child for believing in such things as ghosts. Daniels then put the buck up to Andrew by offering him twenty-five dollars to enter the dining room of the house. They say a couple of fierce murders were committed in this room. Andrew said he would be on the job tonight, but he's been soused since forenoon."

Andrew, who had been asleep at one of the tables, roused himself at this juncture, and joined Daniels at the bar. Fulton made ready to leave but Andrew wouldn't hear of it.

"I'm going through with this thing," he announced thickly, "and when it's over I'll have some money and you'll have your story. I want the money worse now than ever before. I was just dreaming—dreaming it was a summer afternoon and I was a boy fishing with a pin hook fastened to a string with an apple tree sprout for a rod."

"What'll you have?" invited Daniels.

Andrew took whiskey.

"Mr. Fulton," said Daniels, "I am afraid that our friend Andrew is getting too much Dutch courage."

Andrew laughed immoderately at this and looked at the clock on the wall. Perhaps he thought there was little enough time to drink in before the appointed hour, although Daniels bought drinks with a freedom and frequency that soon made him the centre of an admiring group of regular patrons, many of whom had dropped in Cooney's this night for the express purpose of learning the result of Andrew's ghost-hunting.

On the minute of nine there was a curious buzzing murmur running along the bar, and Peter delved into a drawer and produced two large wire nails and a hammer.

"Here be the implements of war," he grinned as he shoved them at Andrew across the bar. "Go to it, old boy, I wish you luck!"

"What's the idea of the hammer and nails?" Fulton wanted to know.

"Why, he's got to drive them nails in the middle of the dining room of the haunted house," explained Daniels. "That'll be proof that he was in the room. I'll look for 'em in the morning."

Andrew stuffed the hammer and nails in an overcoat pocket and stepped unsteadily to the door.

"I don't want no company," he informed the curious crowd that began to edge after him. "I'm in on this alone. I know the house on Tucker Street Daniels says is haunted. Pete, I'll return in about five minutes. In the meantime, if anybody inquires for Andrew you can say that he has gone driving."

Laughing at his own joke, Andrew made a staggering exit, fumbling with his overcoat collar, for the night was bitter cold.

"Set 'em up again, Pete," said Daniels, "and you boys listen to what I'm going to tell you. This is a great joke on Andrew. That stuff I was telling in here the other night about the haunted house on Tucker Street was all tommyrot. There's no haunted house at all. I built them houses and I know. As far as I know nobody ever died in one of 'em from natural causes let alone being murdered. My idea is that Andrew is a

coward and that he is going straight home from here and sleep off his load!"

When ten o'clock came and Andrew did not appear the crowd showed that it shared Mr. Daniel's idea and began to disperse. Those that continued to hang on and drink at the expense of the contractor were very emphatic in affirming that Andrew was a coward who had been very neatly trapped by that prince of good fellows, Mr. Daniels, and "Many happy days, sir!"

At quarter past eleven Fulton bestirred himself.

"I'm not going to wait here any longer," he told Daniels, "but I'm first going to ascertain whether our friend Andrew went driving or went home. Maybe he's asleep in the room of the house you told him was haunted."

"I'm going with you," said Daniels.

So Fulton and Daniels, the contractor, and some half-dozen night owls, repaired to the psuedo haunted house on Tucker Street. The street door of the house was wide open, the key Daniels had furnished Andrew being still in the keyhole.

Fulton was the first to enter the dining room, playing his pocket electric flash before him.

Andrew was there sure enough, huddled in the middle of the room, his face frozen in a look of unutterable terror. The doctor they summoned said he died of fright, and Pete, the bartender, can tell you how Andrew in his befuddled condition drove two nails through the tail of his overcoat, fastening himself to the floor, and so perished from the fear that gripped him when he tried to rise and couldn't.

Thus did Andrew furnish Fulton with another story.

The Case of the Witch-Woman

BY HILDA MORRIS

We hesitated when we accepted this story—clever as it is—because it maligned a good friend of ours—a certain well-known black cat. But we stifled a natural family love to give you a remarkable fiction creation.

I AM a nurse in St. Margaret's Hospital, and my name is Ellen Graves. I am thirty-five years old, and I am,—or at least, I was, before the events which I am about to narrate took place,—a person of cheerful disposition, sound common sense, and few illusions. That I am so still, is doubtful. Few persons could witness the things which I have seen, without a resulting shock to the sense called "common," and a sharpening of those intuitions which perceive danger in commonplace surroundings.

The doctors generally gave me woman patients, and frequently of the neurasthenic type, as my personality is—or was—supposed to be calm and restful.

Early last fall, I was assigned to the case of a young woman, a schoolteacher, who was suffering from a nervous breakdown. She was a pretty young thing, with great mournful brown eyes, and appealing ways, like a child. She was ill for a long time, and I became very fond of her. When she grew better, and her eyes could smile a little, we had happy chats together. We talked of books, and fancy-work, comparing our likes and dislikes. We were particularly fond, as bread-winning women often are, of describing the kind of home we should like to have for our very own.

"I like a fireplace—a big one—a tea-table and the very newest magazines, piled up beside a deep chair," she pictured, like a little girl playing house.

"Yes, and a cat," I added. "I like a fireplace and a big, purry cat beside it."

Her eyes had been happy, but at the word "cat," they clouded over; a worried nervous frown drove the smile from her face.

"I had an awful dream last night," she confided. "That's what woke me up, you know. It was about a cat."

I did not want her to tell the dream if it had been unpleasant, and I moved hastily to put up the shade and speak of the sunshine, but she went on:

"I thought it was here, in this room, glaring at me, from the corner. It was a very big cat, a black one. It was just going to spring at me, when I woke up, all shivery, and you came in."

"Well, there isn't a cat within three blocks of this building, so you needn't worry. And how do you know that the cat was not going to rub against you and purr? Do you want milk-toast or custard for supper?"

I thought I had driven the ugly dream successfully away. We talked on for a while longer, and I told her some of the funny incidents that happen daily in a big hospital. When I left her for the night, she was cheerful again, yawning sleepily, and declaring that she intended making up whole weeks of sleep.

I spent the hour between eleven and twelve at the desk in the hospital corridor. I was on duty, and being very tired, I endeavored to keep myself awake by writing letters and forcing my mind to attention. In spite of this, I think I must have dropped off for a few minutes, pen in hand, for I have a recollection of being roused out of unconsciousness by the sound of a piercing shriek. It was not the cry of mere physical suffering, such as nurses become hardened to, but a shriek of fear—wild, unreasoning fear. I realized, after a breathless instant, that it came from the direction of the room occupied by the little school-teacher. As I sped down the long corridor, the sound was repeated once, and then there was silence.

I entered, and snapping on the light, found my patient rigid with terror, her wide gaze fixed on her hands, which she held stiffly before her face. It was some moments before I could rouse her, and a period of hysteria ensued, during which she cried repeatedly: "The cat. The black cat! It bit my wrists! Look, they are bleeding!"

I examined her wrists, and found not so much as a scratch on them. Yet she declared that they were bitten and bleeding, and seemed unable to take her eyes from them. To quiet her, I bound them up, and giving her a sedative, sat with her until she slept.

The doctor believed the hallucination to be due to a slight relapse in her nervous condition, and I reproached myself for having allowed her to recall the ugly dream of the night previous.

Strangely enough, the patient declared that she had not been asleep when the apparition appeared. She said than an enormous black cat had appeared suddenly at her bedside, dim in the half-light, with glaring yellow eyes. She had cowered away into the far corner of her bed, when it sprang at her and attacked her wrists. She insisted that I search the premises and be sure that there was no cat about.

This I knew to be an absurd precaution. There never had been such an animal in the hospital, which was a large building set in a park that occupied a whole square. Vacant lots extended for two squares on two sides of it, the river bounded the third side, and a large public school building stood in the middle of the square on the fourth. To humor my patient, however, I made a search and inquiries, finding, as I had expected, that no cat had ever been seen in the hospital.

The young woman became quite cheerful by the afternoon of the next day, and the doctor decided that the frightful fancy had done no serious harm to her condition. I left her light burning low, and sat in the corridor near her door, occupying myself, as I had the night before, with writing letters.

The hours passed and all was quiet,

save for the muffled night sounds of a great hospital. Another nurse was to take my place at twelve, and when she arrived, I arose sleepily, intending to hurry off to bed for my brief hours of rest.

But before I reached the door, there was a cry, a heart-rending shriek of terror, such as had sounded from my patient's room on the night previous.

The other nurse stood rooted to the spot with fear. She was a brave, strong girl, fearless every day before death, but the scream filled her, as it did me, with unspeakable horror.

I dashed into the room to find my patient white and still, one wrist locked tightly about the other, as though to stanch a flow of blood. We revived her with difficulty. Her pulse was so low that I was frightened and sent for an interne.

He was much puzzled. Her condition, he said, had taken a decided turn for the worse. She appeared to be suffering from a sudden and most unaccountable anæmia, as if she had suffered a loss of blood. She insisted on keeping her hand locked about her wrist, declaring that it bled.

I bound it up tightly, to humor her, and she murmured something unintelligible about "the cat." We decided that it would be best to move her to another room, where the strange hallucination might not pursue. This was done, but she still felt afraid in the hospital, and after a few days, was taken away to the home of friends. Her recovery there was slow, I have heard, and the physicians were never able to exactly explain her condition.

The room which she had occupied, remained vacant for several days. When next it was assigned to a patient, I was again given the case. This time it was a woman of about my own age, a rather stout woman, who had always been in robust health, until a sudden attack of appendicitis laid her low. Her physical condition was splendid, her blood perfectly pure, and she had made rapid strides toward recovery from her operation. She was impatient to return home to her husband and children, and worried occasionally over the way things might be going on at home. Her two little girls came daily, with their nurse, and regaled her with stories of their school and play.

"The kitty's had a fit," the six-year-old announced one day in pleased interest. "She's better now, but she had a awful fit."

Mrs. Sturtevant showed the first sign of nervousness I had ever seen in her. She shivered slightly. "Don't speak of cats." she said, "I had a horrible dream of a cat last night. I want you to get rid of that kitten before I come home."

The conversation veered away from the subject, but I felt a distinct sense of apprehension. To make it worse, I did not know exactly of what I was afraid. I asked the nurse who was on hall duty to look in on my patient once or twice during the night, and I went off to bed.

But I could not sleep, which was unusual for me. As the hour neared twelve, I decided to get up and sit by the window, thinking that the moonlit view of the broad placid river nearby might quiet my nerves.

I had barely taken my place at the window when I heard it—Mrs. Sturtevant's scream. I suppose I had been waiting for it, without daring to acknowledge that fact to myself. I sped down the hall in dressing-gown and slippers, regardless of regulations. I found the other nurse, herself terrified, endeavouring to quiet Mrs. Sturtevant, who kept repeating, hysterically, "The cat! The cat!" Like the little school-teacher, she declared that her wrists had been attacked and were bleeding. She appeared to feel very weak. I bound up her wrists and stayed with her until morning.

The other nurse was in a very nervous condition. She declared that she had hurried to the room immediately upon hearing the scream, and that she had distinctly seen a large dark body disappearing through the window which led to the roof. She had leaned out to look after it, and was sure that it had re-entered the building through one of the windows of a charity ward, some distance away.

Nearly every one in the hospital had heard the shriek, and there were numerous inquiries as to its cause. It was decided to make a thorough search for the cat, and see whether a stop could not be put to these unfortunate occurrences. The fact that Mrs. Sturtevant had been lying awake when it appeared to her, made it seem probable that the animal really existed. A thorough search, however, failed to reveal any trace of the cat, nor could any person in the institution affirm that he had ever seen a cat there. The hospital authorities were satisfied by noon of the day following, to let the matter drop. But Miss Banning, the other nurse, and I, decided to watch.

We said nothing more of the matter to Mrs. Sturtevant, but I assured her that I would be near her that night, and leaving the light burning, I succeeded in getting her to sleep. She slept, but neither Miss Banning nor I could do so. As midnight drew near and nothing occurred, we felt a trifle more easy, and I urged her off to bed.

"Wait until after twelve," she insisted. Even as she spoke, the clock chimed, and with it came Mrs. Sturtevant's shriek of terror. I have never heard anyone else scream as did the occupant of that room. We were standing near the door and entered in a second.

There on the bed, stood an enormous black cat, larger than any that I have ever seen. It had an indescribably evil appearance, its mouth hungry and snarling, eyes glowing like green coals, back arched and rigid, with stiff upright fur. For a half second we gazed, fascinated. Then, before we could stop it, the thing dashed through the window, and as I leaned out, I saw it clearly in the moonlight enter one of the windows of the charity ward.

Needless to say, another search was made. But nothing came of it. I think the hospital authorities came to regard us as slightly mad, though no one could deny that the fright of my patients had been real enough.

Mrs. Sturtevant, though terribly shaken up, was unhurt. She declared that the creature had sprung

at her wrists, and would have attacked them, had it not been frightened away. She refused to pass another night in the room, however, and as her condition was favorable, she was taken to her home.

I was decidedly averse to receiving another patient in that room. It was in a new section of the hospital, and there was a room next to it which had not yet been furnished. When I was assigned to another case in the first room, I begged leave to move the furniture into the room next door, which was of the same size and shape.

This case was that of a little girl who had broken her leg and collar-bone in a tom-boy attempt at tree-climbing. Her name was Susan, and she was the delightful, tanned, healthy kind of little girl that tom-boys usually are. She was very impatient and restless, and I had a hard time keeping her quiet. I read her story after story, and answered countless questions.

One day, after she had been there about a week, I sat reading to her from "Alice in Wonderland," and came to the part about the "Cheshire Cat."

"Ugh!" said Susan, "don't read that, please! I hate cats, and I dreamed about a horrid one last night."

I almost dropped the book in my perturbation at this remark. Then, not wishing her mind to dwell on the dream, I turned to another part of the book and we were soon laughing gaily over the "Royal Croquet." But as I read, a sudden suspicion entered my mind. Going to the window and leaning out under the pretense of wanting air, I discovered two things which disturbed me very much. The room in which Susan lay, and the room which my former patients had occupied, were the only two rooms opening on to the roof which led to the charity ward. In one of the gray snow-patches which lingered on the roof, I saw distinctly the footprints of a cat.

I determined to make my own investigations before complaining to the hospital authorities again, as I had already got myself laughed at for my persistence in believing that a cat lurked about the hospital. It was not yet noon, and I had plenty of time to make a search before night, when, I felt sure, the thing was bound to appear again.

Going to the charity ward, I asked one of the nurses whether she had seen a cat, and told her what had occurred. She had laughed at us before, and was not inclined to take this seriously.

"I've not seen the cat," she assured me, "and I've got worries enough of my own. One of my patients has taken to sleep-walking, and has frightened the others half to death. They spoke of it some nights ago, but I never caught her at it until last night. And then, would you believe it, she was just climbing in the window. Goodness knows how long she'd been out on that roof, and if she had fallen off and killed herself, the blame would be mine."

This was exciting enough to make me forget, for a minute, my anxiety over the cat apparition.

"Who is the patient?" I asked with some curiosity.

"That old crone in the bed near the window. She's Italian. Lived in a hovel by the railroad tracks, and was injured by a train. She nearly bled to death. She really needed a blood infusion, but charity patients can't have that, unless they have devoted friends, and she has none, apparently. But she's been getting better lately. The doctors say it's quite wonderful. She'll probably leave before long."

The story was commonplace enough, surely. Yet something in it interested me. I walked over and looked at the old woman. Her black beady eyes stared at me without winking, her skin was like yellow parchment, her nose hooked as an eagle's beak, over a toothless mouth. She was a decidedly ugly old woman.

"She looks like a witch," I remarked, going back to the other nurse.

"Yes, with the evil eye," she agreed, and we both laughed.

I returned to the subject of the cat, and after securing a promise from the nurse that she would be doubly watchful that night, I went in search of Miss Banning.

We decided to watch together, by Susan's door. This time, however, we were determined that the animal should not escape us. Miss Banning had secured a promise from one of the internes that he would come up about twelve o'clock with his revolver. If the thing appeared, he was to shoot it.

I cannot begin to tell how long the hours seemed until twelve; though I had expected and dreaded the nocturnal visitor before, never had I experienced such a wild feeling of apprehension as I did that night. Miss Banning, too, was affected. We started at every sound. When Susan called for a drink, I shook as though she had screamed. When the rubber-soled internes came down the hall, their noiseless tread seemed to my excited fancy like the padding of gigantic feline feet.

It drew near to twelve, and our ears were strained to catch the slightest sound from Susan's room. I tiptoed in and found her asleep, and coming out softly, I left the door ajar. It was only a minute later that I heard a soft sound, softer even than Miss Banning's whispered question. Creeping cautiously to the door, I saw it move. Even as I reached it, the latch clicked and I heard the key turn in the lock. Susan was alone with the thing.

Miss Banning fainted at Susan's scream. I think I should have done so too, had not the interne arrived just then, revolver in hand. Somehow, I managed to gasp out what had happened. We dashed into the empty room next door to Susan's, and through its window to the roof. All the time, we heard the child's cries, wild at first, then low and gasping. By the time that we reached her sill, they had ceased altogether.

There stood the cat. I could swear that its snarl was human. Its frightful mouth dripped blood, its eyes flashed fire. For one instant, it stood so, its devilish forepaws resting on Susan's white wrist. Then, as the doctor fired, it sprang. I felt it brush past me heavily. I can feel it yet. The bullet went home, for it gave a hoarse cry of anguish as it

thudded heavily from the roof. I fainted then, for the first time in my life.

The interne must have unlocked the door and called for ai l, for when I became conscious, one of the nurses was bending over Susan, who lay moaning pitifully.

"Did he kill it?" I asked.

"Hush!" said the nurse. "Do get me some water."

I pulled myself together, as a nurse must, and went into the corridor for water. I had gone but a step, when the nurse from the charity ward came bounding down the hall with a frenzied look.

"She's gone!" she cried. "My old woman's gone! They saw her come out on the roof, but she isn't there. Did she come in your window?"

Who had turned the key in that lock?

It must have been my sixth sense that revealed the answer. I could only stare at her dumbly.

Dr. Andrews came back from the park below, and reported that the cat had not been killed, but had apparently made off for the river. It must have been badly injured, however, for a trail of blood lay on the snow for some little distance. Dr. Andrews had seen nothing of the old woman.

A thorough search revealed no trace of her. The river was dragged, but with no results. It was as if the earth had swallowed the old woman.

Susan, recovered from her fright, and apparently suffering from the same strange weakness which had affected the little school-teacher, could tell us nothing. She had been awakened, she said, by the touch of the cat at her wrists. We told the child that the cat had been driven away and would trouble her no more, and indeed it did not. She soon forgot her horrible experience, and before long, recovered her perfect health.

Doctor Andrews was deputed the day after the occurrence, to go with others on a search in the neighborhood of the Italian woman's hovel. He told me the result of those inquiries, and I set them down here, with no word of comment. Who, in this modern world, could comment on a maze of facts that leads to only one horrible and preposterous conclusion?

The woman's hovel was unoccupied. Italian neighbors testified to that. They had never seen her since she was taken to the hospital. They knew nothing of her, except that she had been a witch and they had feared her.

One Guiseppe Romano volunteered to search the cabin with the gentlemen. The door, strangely enough, was ajar. There was but one room—a dark, filthy place, full of vile odors.

Guiseppe shivered and crossed himself.

"Dios!" he exclaimed, pointing.

In the center of the floor, stretched a huge black cat, dead.

It had been shot.

Black-souled Ferguson's Kiss

BY PHILIP SPACE

Deep in all men's souls, the basest as well as the best, is a spark that once touched makes men stand straight. The example of courage sent this man out of the world better than he had lived.

FROM one end of Mexico to the other he was known as Black-souled Ferguson—a grim title and an ominous one. Yet he had been justly dubbed, for blackness dwelt in his soul if it ever dwelt in any. He had given undisputed evidence of this—in the mining camps where he occasionally worked as shift-boss, in the Guerrero hills prospecting for gold, in the bush land where the rubber and lumber camps are situated. At El Oro he had cruelly shot a man down because of a name uttered in drink; on the plains he had killed a poor peon whom the believed had stolen a paltry silver peso from him; in Campeche he had once struck an old woman and scarred her forever. These are but a few of his misdemeanors; however, they should suffice.

Why he had not paid his penalty was strange; men usually do in a country where the finger is quick on the trigger. Perhaps it was because of his huge, formidable bulk, his glowering, bearded face, his deathly dexterous use of his gun. Anyway, he still roamed about at will, hated yet respected, an old-timer who knew his Mexico well. He had not a single person whom he could call friend; and, for some reason, he seemed to gloat over this fact. In drink, it was the one thing he harped on—he hadn't a friend—he hadn't a good word from anyone; and he didn't give a damn; these were his own words in a roaring, reckless laugh.

There are other white men of his ilk in Mexico—men who find it quite essential to keep strictly away from their own countries. Nevertheless, he was the only one of them of whom it was said that not a single redeeming feature did he possess. It is an established fact that there is always some good in the worst of us, yet in Black-souled Ferguson none could be found—he was brutal, heartless, ungrateful. However, there came the day when the streak of decency said to be in all, cropped out even in him. And this is the story of it, for those who care to know.

Ferguson, after several months spent at bossing a gang of peons up at a Pachuca mine, suddenly felt a desire to again visit the jungle of Campeche and offer his services to some lumber or rubber concern. Immediately, as was usual with him, he collected his salary, sold his horse, and took the night train for Vera Cruz. The next morning found him on the coast boat for Laguna del Carmen, and a week later he was mounted on a new animal and making his way through the bush until he chanced

upon some camp.

But Ferguson had struck upon a poor time to visit the bush. The rainy season was late, the jungle was parched and baked, and fever gripped most of the camps and was reeking devastation. He had thoughtlessly not provided himself with quinine, old-timer that he was, and the second day out he knew that fever was coming upon him, partly due to his drinking from a stagnant spring. He cursed volubly to himself, wondering how far the nearest camp was situated, as he dug his spurs into his beast and hastened him on.

The God of Luck usually travelled with Ferguson. Late that afternoon, when his head felt as if it were burning up and he occasionally swayed in his saddle, he came upon a clearing of land with several little thatch huts scattered about a larger wood cabin. He swayed more than ever, clutching the pommel of his saddle to keep from falling. Then, with a final effort to shake off his near delirium, he urged his horse forward and galloped up to the cabin. He threw himself onto the ground and stood against the doorway, his eyes burning, his brain fuddled, his huge body reeling drunkenly.

Then he had a vision of a young woman coming through the door—fair-faced, blue-eyed, golden haired. In a moment she was by his side, and he felt one of his arms drawn over her shoulder, one of hers securely about his waist, and himself being led through the doorway into a room that seemed strangely cool and soothing. Gentle words came to his ears as he felt himself sinking down onto a couch—then the world faded as delirium mastered him.

The next thing Ferguson knew was that he awoke one morning, feeling very weak and very dizzy, yet with his fever and delirium gone. He looked about the room with vacant eyes and at his own form stretched out upon a cot. Then he remembered. Near the window the girl with the golden hair sat reading.

Ferguson scowled and grunted. "Huh, reckon the devil near got me that time, eh?"

The girl turned and rose. She walked swiftly over to his side, her clear, wide blue eyes friendly. "It *was* rather a close pull. But you're better now, I believe. The fever has entirely left you!"

Ferguson regarded her with interest. "Reckon it has," he muttered.

"Do you feel hungry? You can't eat very much to-day, you know!"

It had been said that Ferguson was an ungrateful brute. "No, damn it," he rumbled. "What I want is a drink—see? My throat's cracked leather!"

The girl's mouth hardened. She looked him straight in the eyes. "If you were not a sick man I would resent that," she said coolly.

The she left the room, returning in a moment with a glass of water. She handed it to Ferguson without a word, while he, for perhaps the first time in his life, found himself utterly unable to say a word. This girl, somehow—he did not know why—made him feel a slight touch of shame. But he gulped the water, then deliberately turned to the wall and went off to sleep.

He awoke that afternoon, feeling thoroughly rid of the fever and not quite so weak as before. Seeing that he was alone, he arose from his cot, put on the boots and shirt that had been removed, and seated himself in the chair by the window. Presently the girl entered, and Ferguson scanned the fine figure she made—tall, lithe, graceful, with her wonderfully clear blue eyes her fair face, her thick hair. He knew scarcely anything about them, but he told himself that here was a fine woman—the kind he had read about in books where the authors compared them to the goddesses of old.

"So you're up and about," she smiled.

"Yep!"

"Good!"

"How long was I out of the game?"

"Five days."

"Hum! Pulled through, all right!" He tossed his head proudly.

"Yes—with quinine and care!" She was answering his brusque sentences in his own style, and he found himself liking it.

But he scowled. "Know who I am?"

She elevated her eyebrows a trifle. "Black-souled Ferguson!"

He sneered. "Huh, should 'a' thought you'd let me go! They all say I deserve it!"

"Undoubtedly you do! However, it is everyone's business to save life!"

Ferguson nearly smiled admiration. Hang him, what a woman! All he did was to speak more rudely than ever. "Where am I? Who are you, anyway? Do you live here alone?"

She did not move a muscle. "You're on a rubber plantation over a hundred miles from the coast. My name is Floyde Hathaway. I do not live alone, but my father has made a trip to the coast with rubber and won't be back for about three days. Our peons are out working!"

He nodded his head. "Know of any big camps near here?"

"Yes. Laguna Company—forty miles east. Mexican-American—thirty-five miles north!"

Again the nod of the head. "Reckon I'd better be gettin'. How's my old bronc'?"

"You're animal has been taken care of. Nevertheless, you had better not be getting. You're too weak to travel; you couldn't possibly make the ride!"

Under his thick beard Black-souled Ferguson now smiled. Drat his soul, but he'd never thought there was a woman who could stand up like that and talk. Just listen to her, giving him tit for tat as cool as you please.

"Think so?" he contented himself with saying.

"I'm certain of it," she replied.

Ferguson did not answer. In his varied career he had met few women. Those he had met were not this kind. Even they, though, had shown a distinct fear and dislike of him. Therefore, he cursed the sex in general, boasting that the finest woman in the world couldn't make him turn a hair. He rubbed his chin ruminatively. Perhaps, if he had ever met one like this, years before— But he instantly unbraided himself for being a fool. Hang it, she'd saved his life—he knew that—and he didn't like it. What

business had anyone saving *his* life? Wasn't it his boast that he hadn't a friend and didn't owe anything to anyone and didn't want to?

Suddenly his thoughts were interrupted. The screen door was thrown roughly open and a peon entered. His face was drawn, haggard, vicious, while in his eyes there burned a light that savoured of madness. Also, in his right hand he clutched a heavy revolver.

Ferguson instinctively flashed his hand to his hip—but his belt had been removed. Floyde, with quick eyes, gazed about the room to discover the nearest weapon. Her face was a bit white and she murmured the name of "Manuel" in a whisper.

The Mexican laughed shrilly. "Ah, no; ah, no! Do not move, *gringo* dogs. Stay where you are!"

Floyde and Ferguson were close to the window, perhaps five feet apart, and the peon was blocking the doorway, cutting off all retreat and the path to three rifles that were stacked against the wall near the door.

Black-souled Ferguson rose to his feet, his dark, wicked face filled with ungovernable rage. "You dirty, stinking greaser," he bellowed in his fluent Spanish, "what d'you mean—*what d'you mean, eh?*"

Floyde raised her hand for stillness. "What is the trouble, Manuel?" she asked easily, as if to a child.

The peon's eyes sparkled. "You remember me, eh—you remember my name? *Caramba,* but well will your dog of a father have cause to remember, when he returns."

Ferguson clenched his great, hairy fists, gritting his teeth. To see an insignificant peon bearding him in this manner sent him wild. "What—what's the skunk mean?" he hissed in English.

"He's a man who father dismissed, almost a year ago, for stealing. He swore to have revenge, I remember!"

The peon waved his weapon. "None of your plans, pigs!"

"What do you want, Manuel?" repeated Floyde, her voice soothing.

The Mexican's eyes narrowed. "What do I want, eh? Ha, ha! I want you—*your life!* You remember about a year ago, when your father sent me away? You remember, too, he hit me full in the face, eh? Manuel Arguya is not one who forgets blows; see, there is the scar to remind me! Ah, no; for that single blow your gringo dog of a father will pay well. I know he loves you better than the world. He is going to lose you, what he loves the best! Ah, I have been waiting a long time for this—a long time. Ha, ha, ha! he who strikes Manuel Arguya pays—pays hard, *caramba*!" And he chuckled wildly.

Still Floyde spoke calmly, although her cheeks were now unguilty of redness. "Manuel, you must remember that it is true you stole from my father; and you must remember that he struck you only after you had repeatedly called him some very vile names. He was only just; it was the least anyone would have done. Think how foolish you are. If you killed me, as you say, you will only be shot for it in the end—that is certain! Come now, you are excited and do not know what you say; put your gun away and leave quietly.

Here, if you need a little money I will give it to you!" And she made as if to walk forward.

The peon nodded his head fiercely. "Keep back—keep back, I say! He was just, eh? I called him names, eh? I do not care. I have sworn to have my revenge and I will have it!" He took a cigarette from his pocket, lit it lovingly, and grinned with diabolic cruelty. "When this thin little thing goes out—pst," he snapped his fingers, "you go out! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Manuel," the girl's tone was now sharp, "you had better leave before you do something that you will regret later!"

The Mexican only laughed hysterically and puffed on his weed.

Ferguson stood looking at Floyde Hathaway with a queer light in his eyes. He felt a feeling that was entirely new to him—respect and admiration for this girl who stood up so bravely against a man who had sworn to kill her. She had not whimpered or flinched the least bit. He muttered something to himself under his beard and moved a step nearer, his eyes glowing fiercely.

"You dirty, rotten little snake, you," he roared. "Get out of here—get the hell out of here—*see?* Get out of here before I jump and break your scrawny neck—you slime, you!" One could not accuse Black-souled Ferguson, with all his faults, of cowardice.

The peon backed to the doorway. He leveled his revolver. "Listen; move a step nearer and I kill you. You I don't want to kill; you are not my business. I want my revenge, though, and by the *Dios,* I'll have it! *Madre de Dios, hombre,* I have sworn it!"

There was an insane, determined light in his eyes that told Ferguson he meant every word he said. He swore vehemently under his breath.

The girl suddenly thrust out her jaw. She spoke quickly. "Listen, Mr. Ferguson. When his cigarette is finished and he fires, I'll fall flat on the floor. Then you pick up the lamp on the table by your side and throw it straight at his head. I—I may stand a chance. Will—will you risk it for me?"

Ferguson did not answer, but nodded his head affirmatively, a [illegible] on his forehead. He was th[illegible] the men he had seen meet death, and of all he knew he could not remember one who had done so as calmly as this fine girl before him. Again he scanned the peon, admitting that there was absolutely no hope of dissuading the man from his firm-rooted plans; blustering and threatening, cajoling and bribing, all were of no avail. The Mexican, too, was watching his every movement with narrowed, cautious eyes; the hammer of his weapon was cocked; his slim, nervous finger was even a trifle taut on the trigger. It was an ugly situation—one that seemed to have but one possible end. And he noticed that the cigarette, as the peon took a long, delicious pull on it, was not more than an inch from the end.

Floyde tried for the last time. "Manuel, if you would only stop to think you would realize that you are foolish. My death, in itself, does you no good; it only means your own life eventually. Come now, put up your

gun and take this little money and leave—I will never say anything about your threats!"

But the maddened light in the man's eyes burned brighter. He pulled on his cigarette, wet his lips, and looked at the reddened end of his weed joyously. He shook his head swiftly, time and time again. His words came in a mumble. "No, no, no! My words are not threats—*I mean them.* Ah, they would strike and send away Manuel, these filthy gringo beasts? They would strike him? For that they pay—pay well, ha, ha, ha! Eh, what will the Senor Hathaway say when he gets back? *Caramba,* but he will be sorry he struck poor Manuel! They would strike me—they would strike me, eh?" And again he puffed, laughing wildly and hysterically and madly.

Floyde stood tense, her face set and white, waiting for the report that meant falling to the floor on her chance for life. Black-souled Ferguson took in the scene with eyes that were now wide and crazed, a weird look on his face. His great hands were clenched rigidly by his sides, his huge chest was thrown far out as he held his breath, and his face was more wicked and frightful than it had ever been before.

The cigarette was almost gone.

Floyde Hathaway spoke without turning her head. "Get—get ready, Mr. Ferguson!"

Then Ferguson let loose his breath with a resounding bellow. He turned on the girl, his eyes snapping, his jaw thrust out. "Listen—listen, girl," he said, his voice low and intense. "You're—you're the gamest thing I've ever seen, by God—the gamest! I——I've been a devil in my time, I have—*see!* But—but I'm damned if I'm devil enough to—"

The peon dropped his cigarette with a satisfied cry and his revolver went on a line with the girl's breast.

Then Black-souled Ferguson, like a piece of unsprung steel, shot up from the floor and launched himself straight out at the Mexican. The latter cursed, stepped back, and pulled the trigger. Ferguson seemed to pause midway in the air for a brief moment, a shriek of rage coming from him; then, as the gun spoke for the second time, his huge form struck the peon and his great, sinewy fingers closed about the slim brown throat. Together they fell to the floor.

Before the girl got to them they were quiet. The peon's face was horrible; for those powerful fingers had throttled out life. There was also death on Ferguson's features; but it was death with a blissful smile that he had never smiled alive.

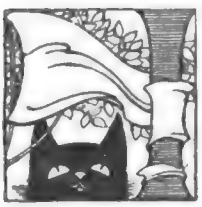
For a moment Floyde Hathaway stood looking at the two. Her shoulders at last heaved and she wiped tears from her eyes as emotion gripped her. Then she went for blankets with which to cover the dead.

Before she placed one over Black-souled Ferguson's face she stooped down, her face wet with tears, and reverently kissed him upon the forehead—the first kiss he had had from a woman since he had been a boy at his mother's knee.

One Night at Pap's

BY IVIE A. MacCARTHY

If you haven't forgotten the thrill of your first plunge into Robert Louis Stevenson, we recommend this one to you.



IT happened at Pap's. You do not know Pap's. Neither would I had I not become friendly with the first officer on the boat going over and accepted his invitation to see something of the life along the polyglot water front of Singapore.

Pap's is not an inviting place. It is small and mean, hot and reeking with smells of badly trimmed oil lamps, stale liquor and bad tobacco. It's behind the scene of life's drama, and the unpainted side of the canvass is bald and ugly, but the actors that cross its stage have played life in all its phases, from the highest to the lowest, and they hold a certain fascination for one who seeks to know life.

Pap's would look like a thousand other places of its kind, but for a few exceptions. There is a variegated band that spans the length of one wall, the skin of one of the monstrous snakes that make the peninsula its home. And on the opposite wall is a spread of horns from a water buffalo that almost embraces the room. And besides, there is Pap. Pap's is Pap's because of him. He is an American by birth—his real name is not known—but there are marks about him that speak of life on a higher level. He has, however, fitted himself into this dark corner with rare adaptability. He can mix a drink fit for a king, or a pick-me-up that would steady a ship in a storm.

He knows, to the drop, the appetite of every man who frequents his place; what is more, he is Pap to every man Jack of them. He advises, helps, bullies and backs every man according to his needs. A man who can call Pap friend, knows where to go for assistance ever after.

But it wasn't about Pap that I was ultimately concerned. I give you these details because I think it was the intangible something about Pap's that opened the flood gates of the man's soul, who told the story.

The officer and I had been watching the tide of derelicts that flowed between the swinging doors, for several hours, until it was very late, in fact, and few interesting characters remained. Strange to say, the few were huddled together in one corner. We had just ordered another iced fortification against the deadly heat, when the sagging doors were thrown open with a bang, and a man, a veritable mastodon of a man, lurched in. He steered his mountain of flesh toward the bar, by a series of tacks, and in a thundering voice, ordered a whiskey straight.

Pap deftly poured the glowing liq-

uor and setting it before the man, addressed him with a respectfulness that the man's appearance scarcely warranted. My interest was caught.

The man took no notice of Pap's words, but seized the drink eagerly. His unsteady hand bore the glass upward, but it swung round in spasmodic jerks, evading the gaping mouth. With a snarl, he bobbed his head toward the elusive glass, but again it escaped him. Another try and the glass collided with his chin, and the liquor slopped over and down his clothes.

Somebody, doubtless "over seas" himself, laughed.

Instantly, the huge figure whirled round, the glass crashing to the floor.

"Laugh, you damn fool!" he bellowed with the voice of a bull. Then, as if a sudden thought had sobered him, he went on in a lowered voice, not altogether unpleasant: "Yes, laugh if it's funny. Laugh while you can. I could laugh once. Now seven thousand devils' eyes laugh at me instead." He gripped the edge of the bar to steady himself and again his voice thundered out. "Maybe it looks funny to see me that was captain of the Princess, spilling my drink like a swill pail in a storm, but it ain't." With a wide sweep of his arm he drew his sleeve across his face, wiping away the sweat that trickled down his polished brow into his eyes.

The man's wild words attracted the attention of the few loafers and they watched him curiously.

The huge figure swayed, then straightened. "You laughed at me, did you? Well, I'll spoil your laugh. Let me tell you something."

He seemed suddenly to pull himself together and walked toward us with a comparatively firm step, sinking into a chair as he reached the table next to ours. The chair creaked complainingly and the table wobbled as his weight bore upon it. Pap hurried out from behind his bar and put a glass in the man's hand, saying, "Drink, Captain."

The captain, so addressed, drank the milky liquid, which had the pungent odor of ammonia, and then sat silent for a moment, seemingly to collect his thoughts.

I seized the opportunity to study the man while my scrutiny would pass unnoticed. There was something almost terrific in his huge size, an ogre from out some old tale, but his fierceness had been vanquished by fat. His features were but little round islands in a sea of fat—fat that might at one time have been powerful muscles, but whose fibre had long since been dissolved by alcohol into gross flabbiness that quavered like jelly. My impulses hovered between a smile and a grunt of disgust, but when the man spoke, there was something in his voice that aroused my curiosity.

"There wasn't seven thousand eyes at first," he began, in a reminiscent tone, his eyes staring straight in front of him as if they looked into the past. "There was only a hundred and fifty. A pair belonging to each of seventy-five Chinese. But I'm running on.

"Maybe you don't know West River," he continued in a matter-of-fact directness. "Well, it means something in shipping circles. Only a good man gets command of a boat making

Wuchow and back to Hong Kong with its valuable cargoes. I had the biggest boat of the line." For a moment the man straightened his sagging flesh into a certain semblance of dignity that suggested a once commanding presence.

His touch of conceit I forgave in a feeling of compassion as I pictured what a figure of a man he must one time have been. The next minute I pitied him as he said in a disheartened voice:

"I don't know why I'm telling this. I ain't got any right to say I've been—but you're not going to bother about lookin' up who I am—and maybe you'll not laugh at the next fellow that's down and out. Talking helps a fellow sometimes."

The man's speech only added to my curiosity. And too, I marveled at the coherence. I had thought as I watched his swaying figure that he was thoroughly drunk, but I now decided that he was one of those men who are drunk on their feet, but when seated, seem scarcely to show the effect of liquor. My thoughts are, however, not concerned with physiological problems. I cared most to hear his story. And encouraging him I said, "You are right—talking is sometimes a bracer."

"So it is," he replied hopefully, then lapsed into silence again, but only for a moment. "I was up West River, and that river has got some scenery, too," he went on, with more enthusiasm. "According to the few travellers who venture up there, it beats the Rhine, with its long reaches and sudden turns, its narrow gorges frowned upon by great cliffs, its queer rock formations and its lofty mountains crowned with temples to their devils—but it's up country in China where white people are scarcer than archangels in hell; except now and then, a flat-bellied, pale-faced missionary, preaching Christianity to the heathen Chinese. But there were villages enough,—vile places full of dirt, dogs and children, smelling worse than bilge water, and the boat called at every one of them. As soon as we slowed up, there would be a swarm of sampans around the boat, so that you couldn't see the water for a hundred yards—the lot of them filled with jabbering, squealing coolies, fighting to get their stuff on the boat, like so many hungry dogs over a bone.

"Our boat wasn't manned for Christians. The chief engineer was the only other white man on board. The mates were Hindoos and the crew Chinese. The divine right of the white man was all that kept the dirty beggars in their places. Two white men against a crew of twenty and several hundred yellow devils every time we dropped anchor, showed what it meant to be a white man.

"It was along about the first of July, and we had made Wuchow and were on the way down with a valuable cargo, a big consignment of money and one passenger, a missionary, Dr. Mason.

"I ain't much on missionaries, but the doctor was a man besides, and even the yellow men knew it and gave him a kind of respect out of their miserable souls that was surprising. It was a relief to have somebody to talk to, at any rate, and I wasn't sorry he was making the trip. He mentioned some reports he had heard of pirates,

but I didn't take no stock in what he said. I had heard some rumors myself, but you can get those any day up West River. And English boats hadn't anything to fear, as they kept their pirating to their own people.

"Second day down, at Luk Ti, we took on seventy-five Chinese passengers. This was a big crowd of passengers, but I didn't see anything about them to get excited over. I looked at them carefully, though, and camped them forward on the lower deck. It was hotter than the devil's frying pan, and from where the doctor and I took our seats forward on the upper deck, we could smell the oil stewing on the hot bodies of the heathens down below.

"Do you know that smell?" he asked sharply, leaning toward us and looking searchingly into our faces. Receiving no answer he went on quickly. "It always means Chinese. It's on their hair, their clothes, their furniture, on everything made or handled by them. You would know it if you met it at the North Pole.

"We were smelling our own sweat, too, that day, it was so all-fired hot. Between the smells and the heat we weren't wanting much to eat, but about the time the sun dropped behind the 'Marble Hills,' the boy said dinner was ready, so the doctor, the engineer, and I, sat down to mess. The dining salon was on the upper deck, just back of my cabin and the two passenger cabins. The upper deck was mostly space, there being nothing between the forward cabins and the engine room, and through the windows you could see almost the whole deck."

The man paused in his story and wiped the great drops of perspiration from his forehead. Behind this most natural action, I fancied I could see an effort to brace himself for the rest of his story. When he spoke again the effort was apparent in his voice, its tone higher pitched and harsh.

"We were having curry when hell broke loose. We jumped to our feet and through the port holes we saw them Chinese passengers bearing down on us like flying fiends out of a nightmare, yowling and screeching like bedlam come; their little brown eyes glittering like sparks of hell fire; their pig-tails cracking and shirt tails flapping.

"If we hadn't had rumors of pirates, we'd have known what we were up against any way, and it didn't take no second thought to bolt the doors and fasten the port shutters. Then they were on us. They stormed around the cabin like a hurricane, shouting seven kinds of Chinese and pidgin English that was fair ear-splitting, with a tattoo on the doors to make it impressive.

"The leader hushed them up long enough to tell us that they wanted the money and that I'd either give them the key to the strong box or they would take it and feed us to the river gods.

"Well, it was a fine chance we had, three white men against a horde of Chinese devils, but I wasn't going to hand anything to those heathens just for the asking, and I told them they would get only what they took and I'd see them damned and beheaded if they dared to take anything. Talk was all very well, but in the dining

salon we didn't have a gun between us and that salon didn't empty anywhere but on deck. We were like rats in a trap. There was some more talk on both sides, but ours didn't have much kick to it, and they were getting restless.

"Then I smelled a 'stink pot.' Know what that is? It's a death smell: pitch and rosin, gunpowder, assafœtida, sulphur and a few other things, smoking with a fume that will kill you before you can say 'Jack Robinson.' It meant they were going to take no chances in fighting us, but put up a few of them things and set by like a cat at a rat hole and wait for us to die or make a run for it. Them heathens are too cowardly to rush anything. They didn't know we wasn't armed, and they figured to get what they wanted without a scratch.

"They smashed in one of the port shutters and threw in several of them stink pots. We could have fired them out again but in that cubby hole we'd have died at the game in a few minutes, so we made a run for it. Noise means something to a coward, and with a whoop like a regiment of us, we opened the door and burst through them.

"My dander was up and as I went through, I left a trail. I put my head into one fellow's spleen—you can kill those rice-eating Chinamen with a thumb-dig in the spleen—I sent another flying over the rail, broke another's head and left a dent in a few others. The doctor slipped around me and into the cabin, but the engineer disappeared. The doctor had his gun by that time and got in some good work. Then they let fly at us and the doctor soon went down with a groan. I took the revolver next and put a few more of them flat. They soon got me, too, through the belly, and as I stopped firing they burst in the door and hauled me out."

The man made a grimace of revulsion, his eyes glittering and teeth showing, but he scarcely hesitated in his narrative.

"It ain't good to have an imagination, but I could see what was coming to me right then, so I played dead.

"They stretched me out on deck and the long greasy fingers wriggled over me and into my pockets, but that being too slow, they tore my clothes off. The hot oily smell of them fair suffocated me and a nasty queue dragged across my face like a slimy eel. I felt their little eyes boring right through my lids and I thought surely they could tell I wasn't dead. But they were too busy to use their wits. When they got the key to the strong box, the most of them went off on a run, but there was an account against me and some stayed to settle it. The hellish cowards kicked me and jumped on me till I most ceased to feel anything. Then I thought of my little motherless girl and just made up my mind that they couldn't kill me. I played dead like a real dead one—but it wasn't easy. Them Chinese are all muscle, and they've got legs like an ostrich, a fighting mule and a battering ram, all in one, and every time they landed on me, it seemed I could hear my bones crack. But it was getting pretty dark and they couldn't see if I winced.

"Fortunately, there was a burst of yelling somewhere off about my cab-

in, and the devils scampered off like a lot of rats for a carcass. I was left alone. Cautiously, I sat up and looked about. I thought I could make for the rail and take my chances in the water, but moving was something awful. The blood was running out the wound like out of an open spigot. I felt weak, but I pulled myself along about three feet. Then the yelling came my way again, and as I dropped back on deck, a dozen or so howling devils came around the cabin with a burning torch. I braced myself for a touch of fire, but they were in too much of a hurry for me. I only got a few kicks as they went by; one landing on my cheek bone, took most of my face with it, and on they went, jabbering and howling down the deck.

"I wondered what they had done to the doctor. I listened for a sound of him, but the crazy yelling of them demons drowned everything. When I thought it was safe, I dragged along toward the doctor's cabin, but I'd only got a move on me when back come them murdering pirates.

"I could smell the burning torch and again I was afraid they'd touch me up with it, and I knew I couldn't play dead against that. I ain't ashamed to say I tried a bit of a prayer that I might live for my little girl—but I didn't know what I was in for then.

"They didn't burn me, but the light caught the flash of a ring on my little finger, I guess, for in an instant, they was fighting like mad to see who could get it, clawing and gouging at my hand like fighting cats. It fitted pretty tight and their long nails dug and tore into me, making it harder to get off. I was prepared for what came. I knew they would never leave the ring behind and it wouldn't come off. I steeled every fibre to meet the sharp pain of the knife. But the hurt wasn't much. Maybe I was past feeling—doctor at the hospital afterward said something about me being under a shock—but there was a grating sound that racked every nerve in my body. I was glad when it was off, anyhow. The suspense was the killing part.

"Then there came the reaction. I think I went off my head, for I had a desperate desire to see that little finger again. I was terribly concerned lest they throw it overboard. I wondered in a silly sort of way, how it would seem to see your finger lying about on deck. But I came back from that foolishness in a jiffy. One of the dirty varmints pulled back my lips and ran his fingers along my teeth, seeking for gold fillings, I guess. It was right then that I nearly gave myself away. Pain wasn't nothing. I was so blasted mad, I near bit the hand off the filthy fiend. But he got tripped up just then and went sprawling across the deck, and I was saved.

"I don't know how often they passed and repassed after that, kicking me as they went by. I was rather numb and wasn't doing much thinking. After a long time it seemed very quiet. I thought I could hear the soft pump, pump of the engine, and the cool wet sound of water slapping against the sides of the boat. I couldn't hear a sound of the pirates, but the smell of them seemed to have stuck in my nose and I was afraid to move for a time. When I tried, I could have sworn my body had turned to stone. I could only scratch at the

deck. My fingers messed into a puddle of wetness and then I remembered I'd been shot and I guess there was more of my blood around on the deck than in me. I thought I'd call out—then I wondered who could hear me if I did. I suddenly remembered that the engineer had not been with us and I wondered what the murdering devils had done to him. I felt awful sick for a moment; I could picture him laying in his blood, too. Then I heard footsteps; I could hear the click of heel nails and I knew they weren't the patter of Chinamen's shoes. But who could it be? The footsteps came nearer and nearer, slow and cautious. They stopped beside me. Somebody felt my face. 'Captain,' came a whisper. It was the engineer. I could only get a croak out of me to tell him I wasn't dead. Then I had a feeling of satisfaction and just went off.

"What happened after that don't count much. The doctor was dead. Luck had been with the engineer. In the fight he had broke through and had run to the engine room, taking refuge behind his boilers—and he was burned pretty bad. He got help though, at the first place we drifted by, and we were put in the hospital at Hong Kong. We both was laid up for a long time. It was three months before I could report for duty. I was given a new boat as soon as I was out, and I was feeling proud of it and all feverish to get up river again. I had seen every one of those pirates come aboard and I had a memory for faces to beat the recording angel. A man has to have eyes for everything, doing business with heathens. I meant to get some of them, at least."

A simpering smile spread over the man's face for a moment, but it died as soon as it came. There was a change in his voice though, that remained,—a cold, cynical note, that grated on the ear.

"I was all right till we stopped at Kwung Ly and the usual crowd of sampans swarmed around us. Then I had a sickening sensation. The smell of them turned my stomach, and I took a dram, but one didn't buck me up much, so I took another.

"As we went up the river, I felt better, but when we came to anchor again and hundreds of brown, stinking heathens clambered over the boat, I had the same sick feeling, so I took another drink. I'd never touched liquor and didn't know what I was up against. By the time we reached Wuchow, I was to the bad. Brown snakes crawled over me, and a hot oily smell suffocated me. Little brown glittering eyes peeked out at me from behind the furniture; they looked over my shoulder, they messed up in my food. I took more whiskey and the eyes began to come out of the air, like a swarm of bees, settling all over me, stinging me.

"The mate took charge of me and I soon got rid of the eyes. I was ashamed, and I thought I understood how to keep a hold on myself. So I did, until the next trip. But the very wind that blew off the villages smelled of them stinking pirates and I was soon as sick as a new cabin boy in his first storm. I took another drink.

"There ain't no use telling you the whole thing. I hit up the stuff until it got me for good. Then I saw the

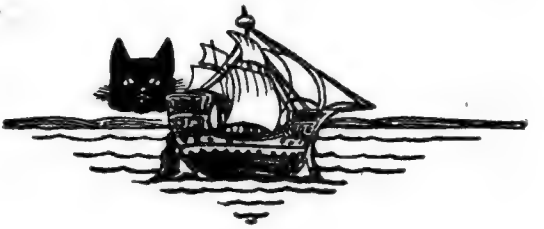
truth. Me that was captain of the Princess, as could whip any ten men, and was afraid of nothing, had lost my nerve. I ain't seen a sober day since, and always there was the eyes —seven thousand of them—I counted them. And I had prayed to live that night. I have prayed to die a thousand times since. Now I can't die. But I'm dead to the world. I'm dead to my little girl. Nobody knows I'm alive but Pap. He made things all right for my little girl."

The man's voice trailed off into plaintiveness, then suddenly burst into a loud challenge. "They say I'm never sober. I know that. But the eyes don't get me any more. They never come till I've had thirty drinks. I stop before I get to thirty now. And I kept my word. I stayed on the job until one way and another I had helped to execute fifty-two of them pirates. I said I'd see them damned and beheaded for everything they took. So I did. So I did."

With a lurch, the man rose, pressed his hand to his eyes as if to shut out some fearsome sight, and I saw that his little finger was missing.

Amid a profound hush, he walked unsteadily toward the door, pushed against the swinging panels and was gone out into the night.

Softly the door slapped behind the huge back like a friendly pat of sympathy. Stillness reigned. Then with one accord, each man raised high his glass, drained it, rose, and went out in silence.



A Feud and Some Fireworks

BY HINTON GILMORE

Small town jealousy breeds a feud; very little red blood is spilt, but lots of red fire!

DRIVEN out of neighboring shire towns by frequent demonstrations of belligerancy, the dove of peace made her home roost in Colbert, Cowan County.

Clayton, Ephesus and Harwood, towns in adjoining counties, had at various times turned over their public squares to the bivouac of hastily mustered bookkeepers and shipping clerks from Lexington and Louisville, while disgruntled feudists skulked in the underbrush awaiting a more convenient opportunity for mutual slaughter.

Not so Colbert. Around the courthouse of that droneful county seat, the flea-bitten mules leaned awkwardly against the hitching rail to which they were tethered while their owners sat within the cob-webbed temple of justice and played checkers with the sheriff and his one-armed deputy.

Colbert had no feud. In the history of the feud-filled mountains, Colbert's page was not crimsoned by so much as a nose-bleed. In the midst of strife the town enjoyed befogging peace. With bands of feudists abrogating the tenets of justice in adjoining counties by intimidating grand juries and unwinding the mortal coils of interfering sheriffs, court sessions at Colbert were unexcitedly devoted to the probate affairs of those who had died quietly and privately at their homes.

While newspaper columns were bulging with the shrieking recitals of bloodcurdling encounters in adjoining towns, the best that Colbert could do in the way of outside publicity was a six line item under the caption: "Strange Calf This," commenting upon an unusual, two-headed addition to Hiram Bonesteel's dairy herd.

But in spite of the peace-enduring characteristics of its inhabitants, Cowan County came ultimately to the verge of a very sanguinary chapter.

Should the Nobel Commission desire to ascertain the mediating hand that checked the conflict it would be well to interrogate John R. Muse, proprietor of the Universal Department Store and dealer, as his stationery proudly proclaims, "in general merchandise, hats, caps, boots, shoes, hardware, notions and sundries."

The rest of the recital belongs to this mercantile mediator. Let it be told now as he explained it to me on one of his periodical trips to Cincinnati to replenish his widely varied stock of merchandise.

"Yes sir, the feud spirit pretty nearly got the best of us last summer. The whole trouble had its be-

ginnin' in certain reflections that Newt McKissick made against the standin' and reputation of Gooch Bradshaw. They was settin' around the store one mornin' waitin' for me to open a barrel of crackers or give away a few almanacs, when they fell to arguin' politically. From the political forum, they advanced to the pulpit and after dissectin' theology they passed on to the world of finance and was discussin' Wall Street clear up to Trinity Church. They had been givin' each other some pretty straight talk and both of them was hot under the place their collars would have been if they'd had any.

"Finally, after Newt had outlined a plan for savin' the country from a period of great financial depression, Gooch allowed that if Newt would pay up his honest debts—chief among which he mentioned the sum of $3.50 due him (Gooch) for corn sold to Newt three years before—he would be willin' to give him credit for knowin' somethin' of the financial needs of the nation. Newt retaliated by reflectin' upon Gooch's honesty, recallin' a community suspicion that Gooch had made away with the hindquarters of a hog that Newt had butchered and left hangin' out over night to freeze.

"And so they kept it up, back and forth, for a long time, until an outsider could have got a pretty good character sketch of both of 'em by just listenin' to their respective opinions. But with all the abuse and justifiable slander, they didn't come to blows, though they promised each other more punishment than mortal man—this side of the Inquisition—ever was called on to endure.

"They jowered at each other all the forenoon, the quarrel bein' temporarily dissolved when Newt's wife tooted the conch shell which meant dinner. Gooch lazied home ten minutes later and knowin' how peaceful the community had always been I didn't attach much importance to the mornin's exchange of felicitations.

"About the middle of June, somebody told me that Newt and Gooch had quit speakin' to each other as the upshot of their spat in the store. That didn't surprise me because Gooch lived across the road from his brother for eighteen years without sayin' as much as 'howdy' and Newt wasn't much of a scatterer of sunshine, either. A little later, more rumors got to me. Accordin' to reports they was makin' threats against each other, bein' put up to it by their kin-folks.

"The McKissicks are as thick as hair on a dog's back up our way and the Bradshaw tribe is fairly numerous. If relatives counted for anything, which they rarely do, both of 'em would be well supplied. But even with the kin-folks mixin' up in it, I didn't expect any trouble because there's always been somebody around Colbert just gettin' ready to kill and maim a lot of other people. Nothin' ever comes of it.

"Over in the next county, if a man says 'good mornin'' after twelve o'clock, somebody'll take mortal slight at the mistake and in a week, there'll be troops in the county seat with the town under martial law. But Colbert was always peaceful and I wasn't nervous even if people did keep tellin' me that trouble was brewin'.

"The last of June come along with both sides spittin' and spattin' at each other and they was all sendin' away for cheap whiskey for a Fourth of July celebration in Wilroy's Grove just out at the edge of the town. One of Gooch's cousins had actually had a fist fight with Newt's youngest brother and the whole town was perkin' up and expectin' trouble.

"Jim Wade, the editor of our weekly paper come to me and said: 'Yes sir, it looks as if we're going to do some business here yet. I wouldn't be surprised to see old Cowan County come into her own with a feud as big and as bloody as any ever pulled off in this section of the state. I look for the trouble to open up on the Fourth of July because every McKissick and Bradshaw in the county will be in here for the picnic, all loaded up with revolvers and bad liquor. In my opinion, the governor will have to rush troops in here and proclaim martial law in order to stop the shedin' of good mountain blood.'

"Now, of course, I wasn't as enthusiastic about it as Jim. I've lived in Colbert nineteen years, while Jim only got in two or three years ago. My experience was all against bankin' too heavy upon the prospects, although I had to admit it looked a little more feudish than usual. In fact, it was the best prospect for promiscuous slaughter that had ever come to my notice in the county. Even the people over at Ephesus and the other next door towns had heard of the threats and was gettin' ready to welcome us into the 'feudland fraternity' as the newspapers called our section of the state. The county judge over at Ephesus even offered to loan us one of their 'bad men' to bring the trouble to a focus, but we replied that we was well able to bring our own feuds to a head.

"Fourth of July fell on Saturday and the boys had made big plans for celebratin' the day with speech-makin', flag-wavin' and other patriotic diversions. There was a picnic at Wilroy's Grove and Squire Maybry was to read the Declaration of Independence just as he'd done every year since it was given to the newspapers, I reckon.

"Colbert was pretty well crowded with people as early as nine o'clock on the mornin' of the Fourth. They had been comin' in from the forks of the creeks since a little after daylight. The word had got circulated all over the county that Colbert was goin' to celebrate the Fourth with a lot of trouble and everybody wanted to see the volcano begin smokin'.

"Excitement was pretty high when Gooch Bradshaw, with four brothers and fifteen or twenty cousins and some of his wife's relations, walked into Colbert primed for difficulties. It was a hot mornin', but every mother's son and son-in-law of 'em had their coats on. Anybody who's ever made a study of mountain habits knows that means artillery.

"Gooch's gang monkeyed around town for an hour or so, buyin' up a little patent medicine to supplement their supply of imported moonshine and then they all went out to the picnic ground.

"Jim Wade, out lookin' for items for his little weekly paper, run into Gooch's crowd and got enthusiastic. He rushed into the store where I was

tryin' to talk business with a young man who wanted to buy a flag with the stripes runnin' up and down, instead of across, and just about yelled at me: 'I tell you, John R., the feud is upon us. Inside of three hours, Colbert will be the scene of wild excitement and I'll be keepin' the telegraph wires hot sendin' out dispatches to the big newspapers all over the country. I've got the first message all figured out. It'll go somethin' like this: "Rallyin' to the blood call of the feud country, ten men went to their doom today via the Winchester route." '

"Jim was so worked up over the prospect that he went back to the newspaper office and dusted off the big type that he kept for emergencies.

"A little after noon, Newt McKissick and a dozen or so of his relatives and friends, all liberally scented with moonshine, strolled into town with their teeth set. It was easy to see by this time that trouble was in the air. Everybody around town, including myself, was convinced that the time had come when Cowan County was about to cut loose with a little carnage. Even the sheriff was satisfied that a battle was brewin' so he went home sacrificin' his natural curiosity on the altar of civic pride. If a feud was started, he wanted it to get such momentum that it would take the state militia to quell it. A half-baked feud that a sheriff could break up would simply bring more contempt on us from the folks over in the next counties. The sheriff was tired of bein' joked about havin' such a snap job and wanted to see Cowan County move up to its place.

"By three o'clock it was as plain as a boil on your nose that the clash was about to take place. Reports kept reachin' me from the picnic grounds that the opposin' sides was surgin' around at a great rate and that it was only a question of time when they'd get together. I locked up the store about four o'clock and hustled out to Wilroy's Grove myself. I wanted to see just how the thing stood. Squire Maybry was reading the Declaration when I got there. The squire had read that Declaration in my presence at a dozen picnics before that, but this time there was a new tone in his readin'. There was fire and thunder and blood in it. It was plain that even the squire was connivin' to bring on the bloodshed to bolster up the peaceful reputation of the county.

"McKissicks and Bradshaws just about had the interest of everybody. Men, women and children quit watchin' the merry-go-round to keep an eye on Gooch and Newt, the clan leaders. It seemed, every minute, as if they were goin' to get together and begin a regular feud. Each side kept movin' around over the picnic grounds as if they wanted to meet the other side, yet I was almost suspicious enough to think that maybe they didn't want to meet each other after all, but was merely tryin' to live up to what they thought the public was expectin' them to do.

"I had to leave the picnic ground just before dark and they was still meanderin' from place to place. Gooch's crowd would be over around the cane rack tryin' to pitch rings

over bull-dog headed walkin' sticks, while Newt and his outfit would be ridin' on the merry-go-round. Then Gooch and his gang would go over and take possession of the merry-go-round, while Newt and his friends was havin' their tintypes taken at the little picture gallery.

"It got to be the worst circular walkin 'match ever staged in Wilroy's Grove. By seven o'clock, most of the people got tired of waitin' for the bloodshed and left for home. By this time, there wasn't anything left for the Bradshaws and McKissicks to do but to come back to town, because old man Wilroy had just rented his grove for the day and he wanted the people all to get out so he could lock the gate.

"It was a big disappointment to the residents of Colbert, but some of the optimistic citizens felt that somethin' might develop that evenin' especially as both the Bradshaws and McKissicks had expressed their determination to stay in Colbert until their respective opponents went home, dead or otherwise. Jim Wade was the most optimistic of all. He even went so far as to apologize to me for the lack of feud spirit manifested at the picnic. 'I'll tell you John R., you mustn't expect too much of the boys at the beginnin'. They've never been mixed up in a feud before and they're a little nervous, but just wait. Tonight, before the big papers go to press, I'll be sendin' out dispatches about the wildest night in the history of Colbert.'

"By nine o'clock it began to look like trouble again. The McKissick crowd was over in my store buyin' two-for-a-nickel cigars and actin' like reprobates generally. Gooch had taken his crowd over to the barber shop while he got his annual haircut. The barber listened to a lot of their wind talk and then sent his little girl runnin' over to my store to tell me to get the McKissicks out of town, otherwise there was bound to be terrible trouble. The barber was a new man just out of barber college and he wasn't use to bloodshed except for the little slashes he made now and then in the necks of his customers. I sent the little girl back to the barber-shop and told her to tell her father to go ahead with the sheep shearin' and to get under the bed when the trouble started.

"Ten or fifteen minutes later, Gooch, lookin' worlds cleaner, stepped out of the barber shop, followed by his band and headed for my store. At the same time, Newt McKissick left the store followed by his outfit and headed for the barber shop. At first, Newt didn't recognize Gooch because of the haircut and Gooch couldn't see well because with his hair gone, the light dazzled him, but finally they figured each other out and stopped in their tracks. Both of them reached for their hip pockets at the same time—cool and deliberate, apparently.

"Here was the crisis that everybody was expectin' and hopin' for. Here was a feud about to make its bow before an anxious public. Everything was ready for the openin' gun and just as the breathless spectators were expectin' the loud report of two pistol shots at the same second, there was a flash of bluish light and a ball

of fire struck Gooch just below his Adam's apple. Before Gooch recovered from the impact of the assault, a greenish flash of light brightened the night and another blazing projectile, comin' apparently from the back end of my store yard, struck Newt somewhere along about the fifth rib. Everybody expected to see 'em both drop dead, but they didn't. They only looked scared and surprised and after awhile a little pleased. In a minute it was clear to feudists and onlookers that some ruthless villain had fired upon the clan leaders with a roman candle—I hate the name of them gimcracks ever since you oversold me on fireworks two Fourth of July's ago.

"Well sir, the effect was amazin'. Gooch and Newt put up their shootin' irons and started for shelter. Some of Newt's crowd seein' what was up yelled out: 'Boys, don't let them cowardly Bradshaws get the best of us; rush into the store and get some roman candles', and in a minute the store was full of McKissicks buyin' that particular brand of fireworks. As soon as they got their roman candles, out they rushed and in surged a dozen or so Bradshaws. One of them yelled: 'Here, sell us some of them new-fangled firecrackers so we can get out there and burn the everlastin' coat-tails off of them measly McKissicks.' We sold them the roman candles and they went forth to the illuminated field of battle.

"After that it was so busy in the store that I had to call in the town marshall to help me supply my customers with fireworks. McKissicks kept runnin' in the front way and the Bradshaws kept the back threshold hot. I divided up the stock of fireworks so that each side could be supplied without comin' in contact with the other crowd. I had too much stock and not enough insurance to have any skirmishes on the inside.

"The battle raged hot and heavy outdoors. Sometimes the Bradshaw boys was on the run and sometimes the McKissicks had to retire from the battle front. I didn't see Gooch but once durin' the fight and that was when he come in after more ammunition. His new hair cut had been ruined because one of the roman candles had set fire to his beard and the conflagration had spread to what was left of his hair. Newt didn't come in off the firin' line, but one of the boys told me that he had been hit in the mouth and had swallowed the ball early in the engagement.

"Two of the Bradshaw boys got cornered by a dozen or so McKissicks and tried to take refuge behind a bunch of mules hitched over by the courthouse. Eighteen mules broke away and run out of town at a mile-a-minute clip, with bridles and saddles floppin' at every step. One of the mules, white with lather, run into Ephesus and caused so much excitement that a half a dozen or so of the leadin' feudists of that town rushed over to see what was going on in Colbert.

"One of the McKissick outfit took refuge in the Widow Craycraft's barn and wouldn't come out until a pursuing Bradshaw had set the building on fire with an avenging roman candle. The conflagration was visible over in Harwood and the newspaper

editor from that town hired a horse and buggy and drove sixteen miles to get a scoop on Jim Wade.

"The reflection of the battle was visible for miles around and some of the residents kept lookin' through smoked glass, thinkin' it to be an eclipse of the moon or somethin' like that.

"I suppose the battle would have lasted forever, if we hadn't run out of roman candles. When the demand got so good we put up the price a little, but Gooch and Newt did a little negotiatin' with Orme Pratt, who runs the bank, and kept their cohorts in ammuniton in spite of the expense. The roman candles finally played out entirely and the boys tried to continue the warfare with skyrockets and nigger-chasers, but they was compelled to abandon the plan because it was more dangerous for the attacking party than it was for the objects of the attack. Of course none of 'em would have thought of usin' a regular gun after that kind of a scrap—it would have been too low down for words.

"After it was all over, the boys bandaged Newt and Gooch up in cotton and soaked them good with linseed oil to ease their burns and they met and shook hands and stopped the feud while it was in its knee pants, so to speak. Jim Weed had already sent in a call for three companies of state militia and three hundred of the trained citizenry had crawled out of their beds to answer the call to duty, but we got in touch with the governor and told 'em all to go back to bed.

"And so peace reigns again in Cowan County and the only disagreeable thing about it all is that some ornery hound has started the report that I fired the first shots at Gooch and Newt just to get rid of that big bunch of roman candles that I had left over from Fourth of July, two years ago."

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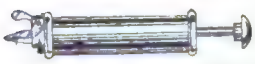

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